

4 September 2016

Dear Members of the Durham University Council,

The world is changing quickly. We are thankful to be part of Durham University, where students, staff, alumni, and the local community put in great effort to ensure that it is not simply an institution which changes with the world, but one leading the change and creating the future.

In order to achieve this, the University is pursuing strategic goals which include creating “world-leading and world-changing research” and producing “critically and socially engaged graduates (...) who enrich society through their (...) role as global citizens”.<sup>1</sup> As such, we must all be open-minded and positive about the changes that need to happen.

However, we fear that the relocation of Ustinov College is not a change that will create a better future for our postgraduate community, Durham University, and the wider world. The proposal of Sheraton Park as a new site for Ustinov College quantitatively and qualitatively undermines the full college student experience and it will decrease our contributions to research activities and community engagement.

As Ustinovians who have participated in Ustinov College’s well-established Global Citizenship Programme, we have had the privilege of transforming the university’s strategic goals into fruitful and acclaimed realities. We appreciate the opportunity to share with you the values which have guided our work, the ever-increasing success of our Programme, its benefits for our College, the University, and beyond, and our hopes for its continued advancement.

No university can claim to be a world-leading institution of higher education without a strong and vibrant postgraduate community. The success stories of world-class universities, from Oxford to Harvard, are made possible because of the attention, resources, and agency the university gives to its postgraduate students. This contributes to world-leading research and builds a bridge between academic and social life and engagement in the local community and the world.

Ustinov College is the largest postgraduate community in the UK and part of one of the few universities in the world offering a unique collegiate experience. As an intercultural student body, the 1,600 students of Ustinov from more than 100 countries reflect our College motto, ‘strength in diversity’.

Both our College and its Global Citizenship Programme are named after Sir Peter Ustinov, known and admired by millions throughout the world as an Oscar-winning actor, Chancellor of Durham University, UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador, and UNESCO volunteer. Sir Peter Ustinov was what many would describe as a global citizen of multinational heritage and a speaker of over seven languages. Through our collaboration with the Sir Peter Ustinov Foundation, we are working to ensure that Sir Peter Ustinov’s cosmopolitan spirit lives on, namely for the education and empowerment of young people.

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<sup>1</sup> Durham University’s “Vision and Goals” (<https://www.dur.ac.uk/about/local/unistrategy/vision/>).

The Ustinov College Global Citizenship Programme itself is a postgraduate community with students from different countries and academic disciplines who host events produced for and open to everyone, from students and staff of the University to members of the Durham community to international visitors and speakers. We create critical spaces for dialogue across different cultures and perspectives and opportunities for community engagement. As a scholarship programme, the Programme offers specific project and leadership roles alongside opportunities for personal, academic, and professional development.

This academic year the Ustinov Global Citizenship Programme has organised over sixty events and worked on many ongoing projects. These events and projects have enabled our College to be the credible arena for academic knowledge and social engagement that the University seeks to promote.

Firstly, the Programme has offered stimulating academic research events within an inviting and inclusive setting. These events also serve to bridge scholarship with everyday life. For example, The Café Scientifique team hosted the presentation, ‘Durham and Dunbar: Identifying the Scottish Soldiers at Palace Green’, well-received by the entire Durham community; before the EU referendum, Café Politique asked the timely question ‘What is Britishness?’ with an interdisciplinary and interactive seminar; the 2016 Ustinov Annual Conference generated productive critical dialogue among its attendees, ranging from the Dean of Internationalisation to the Matariki Network, in order to inform and shape College and University policy on global citizenship education; the Ustinov Seminar’s ‘Conceptions of Mental Health’ event paired an anthropologist investigating non-Western responses to mental ill-health and a local community member involved in Durham grassroots projects.

Secondly, the Ustinov Global Citizenship Programme fosters social responsibility and active global citizenship. It nurtures community among Ustinovians who come from a wide range of ethnic, religious, socioeconomic, and academic backgrounds. It also engages with the wider community by welcoming and cooperating with Durham students and lecturers, local organisations, alumni, and guests from all over the globe.

For example, Café des Arts supported the Oriental Museum during the Japanese ‘On the Threshold’ exhibition; the Ustinov Intercultural Forum celebrated cultural diversity through a Diwali event, an international dress party, and language cafés; the Volunteering Team organises activities with Durham programmes such as RT Projects, Old Durham Gardens, Student Community Action, and our neighbours at Josephine Butler College with whom we jointly cultivate our sustainable allotment; the Race, Crime, and Justice leader organised a ‘Durham Crime Walk’ which enhanced participants’ understanding of our city and brought its history to life. More recently, all the project teams, together with a local art charity and Durham University Museum curators, arranged the ‘We Are the World’ Art Workshop with community-created art and a Matisse Exhibition.

These research activities and this community engagement are documented widely by the work of the journalists, photographers, film-makers, and social media enthusiasts from the Media and Communications Team. Through the blog and the termly magazine, ‘The Ustinovian’, students, staff, the community, and alumni around the world have received weekly updates on these events. For example, students created a professional college video, including drone footage of Durham city and in-studio interviews with Ustinovians who praise the unique community at Ustinov College. This video has over a thousand views and will be watched by thousands more people around the world.

The University's report, delivered after the College Review in March 2016, recognizes the Global Citizenship Programme "for its application to the activities which underpin the Ustinov College experience including scholarly activity and scholarship. (...) The engagement of the Ustinov community with the complexity of diversity that is present within College is commended".<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, the Ustinov College Global Citizenship Programme embodies the values of the University and is already effectively carrying out the University's strategic goals through its scholarly and intercultural events, local volunteering opportunities, and global leadership development. Ustinov College's location, facilities, and staff perfectly enable the Programme to flourish.

The relocation to Sheraton Park, however, will diminish the intercultural and socio-economic diversity and interdisciplinarity at Ustinov College due to a decrease in the quantity and quality of facilities and staff.

The location of Sheraton Park itself is an issue. Since Sheraton Park is close to one specific department and is in a peripheral residential area away from the rest of the colleges with residents protesting against the University plans, it will not provide the neutral location and thus the vibrant and friendly interdisciplinary community possible at Howlands Farm. The Howlands Park & Ride bus service is heavily used by livers-out of Ustinov and students from other colleges, making Ustinov very reachable. At Sheraton Park, a lack of public transport and limited parking will not allow students and people in the community to attend events to the same degree. The 30% decrease in number of bedrooms will further attenuate the diversity of the student body; the non-tiered pricing of accommodation will eliminate Ustinov's socioeconomic accessibility.

The facilities at Sheraton Park also do not provide for the intercultural community and academic activities we have at Howlands Farm. The Fisher House café and bar are primary spaces for seminars, workshops, conferences, and more. The café's high barn ceilings enable creative uses such as an indoor planetarium for Science Day. The bar is a corresponding informal space for continuing academic dialogues. Crucially, these spaces can be combined. For example, we can host evening events in the café while other students socialise in the bar. Alternatively, they were connected for complementary elements during the Ustinov Annual Conference. This flexibility is the key to the success of our events. However, the design of the Sheraton Park site has the café doubling as a bar (if indeed the University can obtain a license for a bar), which limits the space that is essential for running our events. Also, there are uncertainties about the availability of the seminar room at Sheraton Park and the plans do not include the upstairs room in Fisher House that we use for small-group discussions and post-event dinners.

Moreover, the Howlands building is needed to host large events such as the International Dress Party, our friends in the GCR Executive Committee use the space to put on monthly formals, and the College utilises it for mentor dinners. The proposed use of the Business School is not a sustainable solution and it only allows for about half of the guests compared to the Howlands building. Keeper's Cottage offers rooms that are ideal for the teams to hold

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<sup>2</sup> "Ustinov College: College Review 2015-16" document sent on behalf of Principal Glenn McGregor to members of Ustinov College via email on 28 June 2016.

meetings and training workshops. It also includes a dedicated Media Office for the Media and Communications Team to work on projects and securely store equipment. The music room, used by the Café des Arts choir members, is highly valued. None of these rooms will be replaced at Sheraton Park.

The Ustinov Global Citizenship Programme's Director has a specified office where students can work with her on important projects and have instructive conversations. The open-plan office at Sheraton Park will not allow for this type of personal mentoring. The Principal's house being on-site enables our Principal to be visible within the College and to frequently attend events. The ten dedicated bedrooms for guests let speakers be part of the Ustinov family throughout their stay: for example, nine attendees stayed at our College during the Ustinov Annual Conference. Only four such rooms will be available at the new site.

The allotment and surrounding natural area allows students to cooperatively gain a hands-on understanding of sustainability. The Ustinov Mound is not only a beloved and distinguishing College landmark serving as a versatile space for outdoor events but it is a part of the custom-made Ustinov Annual Conference logo. The memorial trees and plaques honouring Ustinovians who passed away during their time here preserve the memory of our fellow students. All of these outdoor-spaces are irreplaceable.

The backbone of our College and the Global Citizenship Programme is the staff, including housekeepers, porters, the operations team, the secretaries, the welfare officer, and the principals. Their steadfast support for our work and collaboration, including their familiarity with our organisational procedures, is invaluable. This will be partially lost with the move.

“The point of living and of being an optimist is to be foolish enough to believe the best is yet to come.” – Sir Peter Ustinov

We have thrived as Ustinovians and Durham University postgraduates by following our College's vision “to be an international exemplar of a postgraduate research community that celebrates the strength arising from diversity, interdisciplinarity and collegiality, and makes a substantive contribution to the intellectual life and reputation of Durham University”.<sup>3</sup> We are committed to maximizing the benefits received by all those affiliated with Ustinov College at Howlands Farm, in the past, present, and future. We want to believe that the best is yet to come – but we fear the opposite.

Carefully looking at the prospects of and plans for Sheraton Park, we realise that *all* our facilities will be either reduced or taken away and staff will be lost. Except for newer buildings (which are not accessible to those of all socio-economic backgrounds) at Sheraton Park, there is nothing in the proposal which will shape a better future for Ustinov College and its Global Citizenship Programme; in fact, the relocation will do quite the opposite.

We therefore urge the University to oppose the proposed relocation of Ustinov College on the grounds that it does not follow the University's strategic goals and will undermine postgraduate contributions to scholarly activity and community engagement.

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<sup>3</sup> Ustinov College's “Mission, vision and values” (<https://www.dur.ac.uk/ustinov.college/aboutustinov/unique/mission/>).

If the above recommendation is rejected, then we urge the University to recommence the student consultation process, in order to guarantee a democratic, transparent, timely, thorough, and, above all, meaningful and fair consultation with all affected parties.

Such a consultation process is yet to be witnessed by Ustinovians and the College's stakeholders. Thus far, in the very unfortunate midst of summer travels, dissertation submissions, and move-out, the short notice about the move has caused us to experience an unstructured information process and inadequate university consultation.

We call on the University to fulfil its own strategy, instead of working against it, by acknowledging the unique college which Ustinov is and listening to, responding to, and working with postgraduate students to ensure the best is yet to come for our College.

This letter has shown that no amount of positivity and open-mindedness will change the fact that the proposed move to Sheraton Park quantitatively and qualitatively undermines the full college student experience and postgraduate contributions to scholarly activity and community involvement in Durham. The relocation will reduce or remove the facilities, student capacity and diversity, surroundings, and staff that make Ustinov the academic and socially engaged postgraduate community it is known to be.

Yours faithfully,

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