Dear students,

As a University, we are committed to creating an environment that is respectful and inclusive. The vast majority of us embrace this goal already and go about our lives, work and study in a way that honours our values and makes us all proud to be part of Durham University. However, where behaviour falls below the standards we would expect, we will take swift and decisive action.

This is not new: we have clear disciplinary policies in place and do not hesitate to act upon them. We are well aware, however, that there is a desire within our community for more to be shared concerning the outcomes of these procedures. We understand this: to have faith in a justice system, it is important to see that justice is being done.

**Transparency in disciplinary procedures**

We have already made some important steps in this regard, including publishing the outcome of our student non-academic disciplinary processes on our website annually. Today, we are announcing further measures.

Effective immediately, we will be publishing serious case outcomes as they are concluded on the Notices page of our website and, to save you having to regularly check this page for updates, notifying you of any addition via Dialogue Signposts.

Today we have published details of two cases considered by Senate Discipline Committee earlier this month.

In the first case, a student committed a serious breach of our Sexual Misconduct and Violence Policy and has been expelled from the University.

We recognise that sexual misconduct and violence are matters of international concern and through our Sexual Misconduct and Violence Operations Group, we are working to make Durham a safer place to live, work and study. We have in many instances led the UK higher education sector in tackling sexual misconduct and violence. In 2016, we were the first University to appoint a full-time, dedicated Student Support and Training Officer (Sexual Violence and Misconduct). Now we are investing further in this area, by recruiting two full-time professional investigators.

In the second case, a student made racist remarks on social media and has been expelled from the University.

We condemn all racism and hate crime in the strongest possible terms: racism has no place at Durham University. Having signed the Race Equality Charter in 2019, we are working to understand any institutional or cultural barriers that may stand in the way of BAME staff and students, and to improve representation, progression and success of BAME staff and students within our University community. We have introduced an online Report and Support tool through which staff and students can report unwanted behaviour and seek support. And we are working to implement the recommendations of the Durham Commission on Respect, Values and Behaviour.

Also on the Notices web page, you can read about the outcome of an investigation into some utterly abhorrent comments made on social media last month. In that case, an urgent
investigation resulted in one male who was due to begin studying with us having their offer withdrawn.

You will note that we are not naming individuals involved in these cases. This is for legal reasons, under the Data Protection Act 2018. However, we hope sharing what details we can will build confidence and provide reassurance.

**Covid-19 disciplinary procedures**

With Covid-19 cases rising and local restrictions in place, we know this is a difficult time for many. So I also wanted to also take this opportunity to update you on new student disciplinary procedures relating to Covid-19 restrictions.

The vast majority of you have responded to the local and national Covid-19 restrictions as responsible citizens and we are proud of you for doing so. However, as I said above, where behaviour falls below the standard we would expect, we will take swift and decisive action.

In the first instance of a suspected Covid-19 breach, we will seek to speak with those involved to explain the risks of their behaviour, encourage them to observe Covid-19 legislation and guidance and remind them of their commitment to themselves, their peers and the wider community made under our Student Pledge.

If serious and intentional breaches are identified and this ‘engage, explain and encourage’ approach has not resolved the situation, we will apply our formal disciplinary process, using a graded ‘yellow, amber, red’ response system.

For a first, low level breach of regulations, a yellow warning will be issued by the student’s College. For a second or more serious breach, an amber warning will be issued – a formal warning will be added to the student’s record and this may be accompanied by further sanctions including a fine of up to £500 or community service of up to 75 hours.

For a further breach or where serious aggravating factors are identified, a red warning will follow, with sanctions including permanent exclusion from the University.

Supporting this will be our new University Security Community Response Team (CRT), which we have established to support Durham Constabulary in local Covid-19 policing. We will be saying more about this initiative later this week.

**Conclusion**

I hope this information, though lengthy, is helpful. As we progress through the early stages of the Term, I wish you every success. Stay safe and stay well.

Best wishes,

**Stuart Corbridge**
**Vice-Chancellor and Warden**