

Van Mildert College Senior Common Room

Annual General Meeting 2021/2022

Reports

SCR Co-Presidents

It seems no time at all since our Report to the delayed AGM in March 2021 and unfortunately until recently the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has constrained our ability to organise in-person SCR activities, particularly indoors, with the health and well-being of our membership being the key priority.

Nevertheless, this period has seen some very important milestone events. Professor Dave Harper retired from the University in August and the SCR played its role in organising and participating in the highly successful **Farewell Event** on 10 July. Thanks once again to all those who attended the event and to those who contributed so generously to the SCR gifts for Dave and Maureen.

Our new College Principal, Professor Tom Mole, took up his appointment in early September and it was lovely to see so many members back in College for the SCR's **Welcome to the Principal event** on 21 October.

The Book Club has continued to meet virtually and we are very grateful to Kathryn Armstrong for enabling this to happen. She has shared an overview of the group's activities alongside information on how you can take part. Thank you to the group for such a varied and engaging programme.

There has also been a range of online events and activities organised by College through the **Dimensions** programme and other college groups, including the JCR and MCR, and we are grateful to them for extending invitations to SCR members.

We are looking forward to organising more in-person SCR events, starting with an **SCR walk** in the Croxdale Estate on 27 November. Hopefully in the spring it will be possible to undertake the next stages of the **Camino Inglés** under the leadership of Keith Taylor as well as offer in-person lectures. We will remain guided by College regarding opportunities for catered events given the current shortage of staff in this area of the University's provision.

The Executive Committee has continued to meet regularly to discuss activities and how we might support students and the wider College. We welcome ideas from members for future initiatives – please do not hesitate to get in touch with the SCR Committee at vm.scr@durham.ac.uk.

We would like to thank Dave, Vicky, Liz and Sharon for their continued support of the SCR over the period and to Tom for his supportive engagement with us since he has taken up his role. Thanks are due also to Richard and Charlotte for their work over the year on behalf of the SCR as Secretary and Web Coordinator, and Events Coordinator respectively.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank you as SCR members for your continued support of the common room and college throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. We send our very best wishes for 2022 and look forward to welcoming you to future events and activities.

*Kate Deeming and Martin Brader, SCR Co-Presidents
November 2021*

College Principal

Prepared for the Annual General Meeting of the Senior Common Room, 23 November 2021

Prof Tom Mole

The past year has been a notable one in the life of the College, not least owing to the retirement of one Principal and the arrival of another. Prof David Harper officially handed over the reins to me on 13 September 2021, ending a distinguished decade as Principal of College. Mildert bid Dave farewell with characteristic aplomb, in a series of events over several weeks. For many, the most memorable moment will have been the ABBA tribute band, for others it will be Dave's reflections on his time in College and the many achievements of his tenure, including great steps forward in sustainability and the green agenda. I missed most of these celebrations, but the great affection and esteem in which Dave was held by the College community was immediately apparent to me. To a new arrival, this was both a pleasure and a challenge – a pleasure to see what friendly and supportive community I was joining, and a challenge to measure up to Dave's example.

Less happily, the year will also be remembered as one disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The College took extraordinary steps to sustain our community in this challenging time, despite having to navigate many restrictions. Although many of the restrictions have now been relaxed, Covid is very much still with us. Our approach with the new academic year shifted from one focussed on rules to one focussed on cultivating personal responsibility. We are monitoring air quality in spaces where students gather, requiring evidence of a recent negative LFT result from all students participating in College activities (including visiting the Bar), and requiring everyone to wear masks in the main College building unless seated in the Bar, Dining Hall, or Library. I'm happy to report that the incidence of confirmed cases of Covid across the University remains very low.

As a new Principal, my first priority is to listen and learn from the College community in order to understand how it functions and how it can be improved. My first weeks in the post were filled with many meetings with College staff at all grades. As a result of what I learned from them, we've introduced some new initiatives that are now underway. First, we have some 'back-office' processes to tidy up. We've introduced a new schedule of regular meetings that aims to promote effective information sharing and consultative decision making. We've begun to renew our student record keeping, moving it into MS Excel and providing bespoke training for the staff involved. And we've begun a project with colleagues in CIS to improve and update how we store and share information in College, particularly using MS Office 365. These initiatives take place behind the scenes, but they will reduce workloads and make College administration more reliable and efficient.

Second, we have initiated some more student-facing projects. A pair of new noticeboards will soon appear in the foyer. One will introduce College staff, with photos and short biographies. The second will feature a different member of the College community every few weeks. Undergraduate and postgraduate students, home and overseas students, porters, receptionists, housekeepers, front-of-house staff, catering staff, Principal's office staff, and SCR members will all feature over time. The aim is to identify, amplify and celebrate the diversity of our community.

I have instituted a new tradition of 'Principal's Drinks' on Monday evenings, where students are invited in groups of 30 to a short drinks reception in the Lakeside Room with senior members of College staff. This provides an opportunity – previously lacking

– to meet students in small groups. The first events in this series have been well attended and enjoyable.

This term a staffing crisis across the university – and indeed more widely – has made it extremely difficult to recruit and retain staff in our catering operations. As a result, the University directed us to pause all formal dining this term. Like other colleges, we have tried to find creative responses to allow us to continue gathering. We held a cheese and wine reception for returning students, and a reduced Halloween Formal. The good news is that, as a result of a raft of measures introduced across the University, staffing shortages seem to be easing slightly, and we expect to host two Christmas Formals as usual. The outlook for next term remains unclear at the time of writing, but we hope for a return to a more normal dining schedule before too long.

I've heard from many SCR members who are keen to resume their work as College mentors. Having paused mentoring during Covid, I have now asked the Vice Principal to undertake a consultation with mentors and students and to make recommendations about how best to resume mentoring in future. The Pro-Vice Chancellor has asked me to lead a review of mentoring in all Durham's colleges with a view to providing some principles and examples of best practice across the University. These two overlapping pieces of work will produce results next term.

Some of you may have seen reports of drink-spiking in Durham and other university cities around the UK. This has been a serious concern, and Mildert has played its part in the University response. Our femsoc organised our local 'Big Night In' in October to raise awareness of this issue and provide support to those affected by it. We are providing drinks covers in our bar, circulating information and advice on this topic, and installing additional CCTV in and around the bar.

Looking forward, the condition of our College estate is a significant concern. A historic lack of routine renovation work has left our buildings in need of updating, while interruptions to the usual maintenance of our grounds during Covid has created a need to catch up. Some of this work is already in hand. Our lake will receive some attention this winter, with self-seeding trees removed, reeds and weeds thinned out, and silt partially removed to make the lake cleaner, more presentable, and more welcoming to wildlife. We will replant our wildflower meadow this year. Plans are well in hand to build a new boathouse on the River Wear, and we will soon begin fundraising to buy new boats and equipment for the Rowing Club. We have seen preliminary designs to renew our forecourt area, providing a much-improved first impression of the College, with fewer car parking spaces and more plants.

Other areas of concern, however, still need to be addressed. We urgently need to renovate and improve our Library, Bar and Beer Garden, Turner Room, music practice space, and foyer. We also need to think carefully about the provision of performance space in College, informal study space, and the gym. In all these areas, we will work with the University to secure as much funding as we can, and to draw on in-house support and expertise. But we will also need to raise significant funds from alumni and other donors in order to realise our ambitions. With this in mind, we will work with Development and Alumni Relations to develop a strategic development plan for the College over the coming months identifying priorities, costs, and our fundraising approach.

I'd like to finish by thanking the SCR for inviting me to a 'Meet the Principal' reception last month. It was a pleasure to see so many SCR members at that event; I look forward to continuing many of the conversations started on that occasion, as well as to meeting more members of the SCR in future.

Treasurer

Context

This report provides an overview of activity of the Senior Common Room Treasurer for the AY 2020/2021.

Financial Review

Following the review of SCR finances in the AY 2017/2018, a series of new practices were adopted including regular review of the subscription fee level and expenditure aligned to an agreed budget. Expenditure has followed budgetary guidelines unless additional expenditure has been formally agreed by the Executive Committee.

Senior Common Room Budget

For the AY 2020/2021, the SCR Executive Committee adopted the budget established in AY 2018/2019, which allowed greater support for student activities and funding support. The budget (shown as percentages) is as outlined below:

	AY2017/18	AY2018/19	AY2019/20	AY2020/21
Income				
Membership Subscriptions	100	100	100	100
Expenditure				
Events	40	30	30	30
Scholarships	40	50	50	50
Student Activity	15	18	18	18
Admin/Other	5	2	2	2
Total	100	100	100	100

Scholarships Programme

When possible to do so, the Senior Common Room continues to support SCR Arts Scholarships, with a total cost of £900-950 per year. The SCR Arts Scholarships provide funding to 'encourage the development of the arts life of the College across all areas whilst also nurturing a student's personal development'. The cheque for AY 2020/2021 has been prepared but not yet processed.

SCR Membership

Van Mildert College SCR remains part of the membership allocation scheme for new members of Durham University staff, which has seen a number of new members for the AY 2020/21. We are delighted to welcome them!

SCR Membership Fees

Following a review of the SCR membership fee in 2019, the fee remained unchanged for the AY 2020/21. Given the Covid-19 pandemic, the SCR Executive Committee has also agreed to keep the same fee level for the AY 2021/22:

Membership Type	AY2019/20	AY2020/21	AY2021/22
Single	£25	£25	£25
Joint	£35	£35	£35
Associate	£15	£15	£15
Mentor	-	-	-

Questions?

Please contact the SCR Treasurer, Dr Martin Brader at vm.sctreasurer@durham.ac.uk.

SCR Account Overview – Academic Year 2020/21

Account Overview

Balance (01 Dec 20)	Credits	Debits	Balance (1 Nov 21)
£7614.66	£2455.00	£1392.34	£8677.32

Account Balance	Word Sharing ^a	Fine Arts ^b	SCR Funds
£8677.32	£693.86	£145.19	£7838.27 (£6278.23)

Income

Income	Budget (%)	Budget (£)	Realised	Variance
Membership Fees	100	£1821	£1955	+7%

Expenditure vs Budget

Expenditure	Budget (%)	Budget (£) ^c	Expenditure	Variance
Events	30	£586.50	£0	+100%
<i>Welcome to the Principal*</i>		<i>£260.04</i>		
Scholarships	50	£977.50	£0	+100%
<i>SCR Arts Scholarship*</i>		<i>£950.00</i>		
Student Activities	18	£351.90	£0	+100%
<i>JCR Outreach*</i>		<i>£350.00</i>		
Administration/Other	2	£39.10	£47.99	-23%
<i>Gift</i>		<i>£47.99</i>		
Total	100	£1955	£47.99	

Ringfenced Funds	Budget (£)	Expenditure	Remaining	Remaining (%)
Word Sharing	£693.86	£0.00	£693.86	67%
Fine Arts	£145.19	£0.00	£145.19	100%
<i>JCR Arts Activities*</i>		<i>£145.19</i>		
Harper Retirement	£500.00	£517.45	£-17.45	-3%
<i>Harper Retirement</i>		<i>£487.22</i>		
<i>Harper Retirement</i>		<i>£30.23</i>		

Explanatory Notes

^aWord Sharing

In the AY2017/18, the Senior Common Room submitted an application to the Van Mildert College Trust in support of *Word Sharing* – a series of literary events coordinated by the Senior Common Room. In total, £1500 of support was secured for this project.

^bFine Arts Committee

Historically, the Senior Common Room held funds for the Fine Arts Committee, which is now defunct. These funds have been allocated for expenditure to support the arts.

*Anticipated expenditure

Payments have not yet been processed.

Secretary and Web Officer

The role of Secretary is very much more behind-the-scenes than the other Officer roles, and as such my report will be somewhat shorter than the others.

My main role in the past year has been overseeing the transition of the SCR's webpage to use the new platform hosted by the University. The transition has now been completed, and the new SCR website is live.

It can be found at <https://vmscr.webspace.durham.ac.uk/>. The content for the website is currently in the process of being refreshed by various members of the Committee, and hopefully the site will now be stable for several years to come.

As you may be aware, the Web Officer position is up for election at this meeting, and I am not re-standing for it (although I will be continuing as Secretary). This role provides a fantastic introduction to being a member of the Committee, and I would not hesitate to recommend it to anyone who is interested. Feel free to get in touch with me if you have any questions or queries about the role!

Book Club

From November 2020 the College book group has continued to meet virtually (on Zoom) except for the last meeting before the summer break when we met in college for Maureen's last meeting with us before relocating to pastures new.

We have discussed and enjoyed a wide range of books from revisited classics (Golding's *Lord of the Flies* and Hans Fallada, *Alone in Berlin*) to prize-winners Anna Burns - *Milkman* and *The Shipping News* by E Annie Proulx. Crime seemed to feature quite significantly with choices including *Where the Crawdads Sing* (Delia Owens), Josephine Tey's classic cold case murder, *The Daughter of Time*, and *Gentlemen and Players* by Joanne Harris.

Since the summer break we have enjoyed *Dangerous Women* by Hope Adams and Sarah Baume's heart-felt tale of a misfit and his dog, *Spill, Simmer, Falter, Wither*.

Our Christmas meeting concerns Julian Barnes' *Arthur and George*, when we will be trialing combining meeting in person in the Prowse Room with the option of joining in on Zoom for those wishing to take part at a distance!

The titles waiting for us in the new year include *Wakenhyrst* by Michelle Paver, A M Hurley - *The Loney* and Kate Grenville- *The Secret River*.

Though membership remains steady at 9 or 10, new members are always welcome. Please contact Kathryn on k.m.p.armstrong@btinternet.com for details.

Kathryn Armstrong
8.11.21