



MISSION AND AIMS

This documents the long term goals, mission statement and future of DST.

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Introduction

The aim of this document is to outline where Durham Student Theatre, hereafter to be referred to as DST, is heading and what it aims to achieve on the way.

This document has been prepared through consultation with the DST Executive, its theatre companies and its members. The feedback has been gathered confidentially.

This document takes you through our feedback in a generalised view, attempting to cover the variety of insightful and useful comments made by many members of the society. It takes time to consider the different aspects of the feedback.

This feedback is then used to write the mission statement for the society and formulate a set of aims for the improvement of the society. These aims are separated by their style and are hoped to be completed within 5 years, but should be reviewed regularly.

The mission and aims of the society follow the constitutional obligations of the society, and the expectations of both the Durham Students' Union and Experience Durham have been taken into consideration. We have also endeavoured to meet the expectations and interests of our entire membership, no matter what type of member they are.



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Our Society

Who We Answer To

DST has several different aspects and different people to answer to. Our primary responsibilities lie with our members who expect us to facilitate one of the best societies Durham. However with such a diverse member base we consider our membership as follows;

- **Supportive Members** – These members join the society simply because they have an interest in theatre, they may see numerous shows in their time at Durham and regularly read the What's On section of our weekly email. They make the most out of the DST Members ticket discount.
- **Performing Members** – Obviously as a drama society a lot of our members are interested in performing on stage. DST offers them a centralised place to find out about upcoming audition opportunities. DST aims to offer development opportunities for these members and support those who wish to further their careers in the theatre.
- **Production Team Members** – An important part of every show and also of DST are those who take on the production team roles. DST offers support for these members possibly stepping into the roles for the first time encouraging development and discovery of the role, an important part of gaining skills necessary for working in the theatre industry as well as offering key leadership and responsibility experience.
- **Technical and Backstage Members** – Many members of DST are more often seen behind the scenes of DST shows. With these roles we do our best to expose these members to professional theatre working environments, allowing them to develop their skills in every aspect of theatre from set design to costume making. Running our own theatre allows the best developmental opportunities we could hope for, giving these members the opportunity to experiment easily and in a safe environment.
- **Reviewing Members** – These members watch shows throughout the University and review them for many different publications, including our own *First Night*. Often this is done by members in addition to another area of interest.
- **Theatre Company Executives** – Several members also run one of our many theatre companies. DST aims to offer these members important opportunities to promote their shows, sell tickets and support for ensuring shows are safe and legal.

However we understand members may not fit into just one of these categories and our aim is to offer services that benefit all of these varied membership types. For this document we have asked members what they think about the society.

We also answer to the Durham Students' Union (DSU) and through our ratification with them we agree to abide by their regulations as outlined in the *Society Regulations* document. DST also strives to meet aims set out by the Union in their strategic plan. Finally, we aim to also meet with the objectives outlined in *Experience Durham Strategy 2010-15*. We hope to continue our good working relationships with both the DSU and Experience Durham to help raise the profile and stature of DST in the future, this is aided through the DST Sabbatical Officer who acts as a liaison between us and the university.



Our Constitution

The DST Constitution has recently undergone a significant review by the 2012/13 Executive and our members. In the constitution the DST is required to do the following;

- To provide advice for theatre companies and production teams, particularly in the areas of venue booking, applications for funding, equipment hire and ticket bookings
- To provide and maintain a working and up to date website, advertising all of DST's services
- To organize and promote the Durham Drama Festival
- To promote Durham Student Theatre and its subsidiary theatre companies in events outside of Durham, including, but not limited to, Edinburgh Fringe Festival and outside student drama festivals
- To represent the theatrical applications for funding on the Durham University Arts Management Group (DUAMG) committee
- To promote the use of the Assembly Rooms theatre, the Theatre Module and other university and DST owned resources
- To manage The Assembly Rooms theatre, including, but not limited to, box office service, retail provision, and technical services.
- To organize and regulate the application procedure for The Assembly Rooms Theatre for subsidiary theatre companies according to the procedure and assessment criteria set forth in "Assembly Rooms Application Procedures"
- To arrange workshops and speakers on subjects relevant to drama and theatre productions
- To arrange trips to local theatres and other social activities for DST members.
- To publicize planned productions of subsidiary theatre companies to the best of its ability, including, but not limited to, the DST website and a termly "What's On Guide" and assisting in contact with student and local press
- To advertise and support a "Fresher's Production" or "Fresher's Play" in Michaelmas term

These objectives remain at DSTs forefront and whilst they may not all be directly discussed in this document are to continue, and constantly grown and built upon.

Our Members' Feedback

Over summer 2013 we undertook a survey of both active members and alumni to gauge opinions of how the society. The following details our findings from the survey.

Our Reputation

When asked how they found out about DST many members said that they found out about us at the freshers' fair, with the notable exception of the 2012 intake who mainly found out about DST through other means such as our website or through friends. This is an interesting exception as it was felt that our freshers' fair publicity last year was not as strong as in previous years and we were only permitted one day inside the fair.

Of more interest though is that no member had heard of DST prior to their arrival at Durham and many not aware of our very strong theatre. This is an important factor DST should work to improve.

Our Communication

Communication is a very important part of a society of our size. We started by asking our members what they thought of the information given to them when they joined and how it helped them get involved. Whilst overall the response was slightly positive it is clear that this is an area that needs improvement for our members. On the whole the opportunities for acting and technical theatre seem well communicated however production team roles seem to need more improvement.

I think as someone who wanted to go straight into directing rather than acting, I found it quite difficult to understand the system and get to know people.

Auditions were very well advertised - my only issue was that I was more interested in directing!

After joining it seems that many members are happy with the communication about opportunities available to them through the weekly email. However there is a small concern that Comedy is difficult to get further involved in, so there is the potential DST needs to address the balance of its emails.

However, there are mixed feelings with regard to the communication of general information to the society as whole. Several members feel like they hear about information through gossip rather than officially from the society. Obviously this leads to issues of misinformation within the society and makes the society feel like the Executive are hiding things and not working to their benefit. From the feedback it is clear our general communication should be improved.

Its not an issue of transparency as such, because DST members can find out about most things - its just that most of this occurs by word of mouth so ends up being gossip rather than useful information.

There have clearly been problems on this front this year between the exec and the membership - largely inevitable, I'd say, in a society of this size and nature, but efforts to minimise them are certainly important.



Our Support

When asked about support for shows in The Assembly Rooms, those who have been involved in Assembly Rooms shows all felt supported in the technical aspects of the theatre. However there was a mixed response to Box Office support, and whilst most felt the system had improved the system could be better communicated to members. Creative support was provided where necessary but a few members noted that they were not sure if creative support was in the remit of DST.

When it comes to support for putting shows, on many are not sure how directly DST offers support and it seems to come more informally from friends made in DST rather than through the Executive or from the society as a whole. Whilst DST mainly aims to facilitate theatre it can be noted here that possibly we could be doing more to improve linking first time production team members to more experienced members in the same roles.

Our Website

A regularly debated issue is our website. Members were asked what aspects of our website they used, all of the responses said they used both the Online Bookings and the First Night aspects. Areas like the Production Database and Production Guide aspects are used by roughly three quarters of our members and most other aspects used by those they apply to, such as listing creations, the Module and audition notices.

However, when asked if they feel like our website is fit for purpose many members said they either neither agree nor disagree, disagree or strongly disagree. Many members noted that whilst it may (just about) work in most areas its outdated look lets the front of the society down, several also note it is hard to navigate and doesn't include much information on the society, and on how to put on shows.

It need[s to be] updated, modernised - the website navigation is poor.

Other than dealing with ticket sales, the website is very poor in all areas

Our Alumni

Many members expressed an interest in continuing links with DST after they leave the university. Many said they would take advantage of Alumni offers on things such as DDF tickets and would attend Alumni events.

However, several noted that we should improve our Alumni connections and that through regular (not more than termly) emails or a dedicated website area would be best.

Our Present

We asked members what the most important thing the society did for them, and we got varied responses. In many ways this reflects DST's wide umbrella approach, by attempting not to micromanage and giving a reasonably free reign to our members we allow creativity to thrive and grow. It is important to people that we facilitate all forms of theatre and create a strong

group of people to support others. At the same time it is important to people we also safeguard and support all our members in their various theatrical endeavours.

Connects me with people who are interested in working together and providing me with great opportunities.

Creating moments onstage which audiences don't forget

Puts on high standard theatre

Provides a forum for students to put on their own theatre, provides support for this and is pretty much unique in terms of how it operates

Our Future

DST is an ever-evolving society, responding to our members, the community and the theatre industry. As a result we asked our members what they would like DST to change in the future. Of key importance was better development and workshop opportunities. It has also been noted elsewhere but it has been emphasised that we should improve our transparency and communication. From improving these it is also then key to make use of networking opportunities, and further support for different theatre societies.

More workshops are needed, with good advertisement - to bring DST members together as a society and give those not involved in productions a way to still feel a part of DST

More training, we don't have a dedicated theatre degree, which is great because we all come from such varied backgrounds, but raising production values could sometimes be good. It would also be useful as something to demonstrate to future employers some seriousness in approach. Also raising the profile outside of Durham, we do awesome stuff...

We also asked our members where they expected to see us in 5/10/20 years, which yielded a mixed set of responses. It is difficult to summarise these responses for this report and many suggestions have been included in the aims outlined in this document. An emphasis was made of greater cohesion with theatre companies, and to continue to be sustainable and build the reputation we deserve. Concerns were, however, voiced about DST losing what makes it unique as a theatre society in the way it runs. It is important DST keeps its unique stance to facilitate drama and help develop our members, whilst allowing everyone to get involved in any aspect of theatre in Durham.



Our Mission Statement

Durham Student Theatre exists as a community to create, develop and support drama at Durham University. We are unique in that we have our own proscenium arch theatre and a variety of quirky venues across the historic city of Durham. With over 600 members DST is brimming with creative likeminded individuals who come together to perform a diverse range of shows. Whether its organising the Freshers' Play or the celebration of new writing that is Durham Drama Festival, DST seeks to involve and encourage all of its members to get involved. Whether you want to be onstage, backstage, produce, direct, or even run your own theatre company Durham Student Theatre aims to provide opportunities and to support its members in what they love doing, and to thrive, develop, enjoy and ultimately make the most of the high quality theatre we offer.



Our Aims

The aims outlined below are designed to take place over a five year period, although different aims will have differing timescales. They are planned to be taken on by each new Executive and built upon with the society.

Communication

- To better to communicate the society to new members and freshers through the improvement of information available online, a new welcome booklet for new members and better publicity about us being made available to those interested in joining DST.
- To better communicate the daily running of the society and the decisions made by the Executive through regular president's emails, making the minutes of meetings available to all society members and to offer more time to talk to the Executive and ask questions.
- To better communicate opportunities outside of Durham with industry professionals.

Development and Support

- To improve the support given to new and existing theatre companies through more available information, and to offer better support from and access to Executive members.
- To improve development opportunities for members by increasing workshop frequency and quality. DST aims to try and work with industry professionals in all aspects of theatre to ensure members have opportunities to develop their skills.
- To offer more support for members working in locations outside of The Assembly Rooms to better facilitate a variety of drama.

Networking and Reputation

- To improve the reputation of DST at a national level so people know of the quality, variety and sheer volume of drama put on in Durham. Facilitating a better representation at other student drama festivals (such as NSDF) and through greater visibility at University open day events.
- To improve our networking links by forging stronger links with Alumni and industry professionals.

- To investigate and build long term links with more as well as larger UK playhouses, this will build a network of theatres and industry professionals to draw from.
- To develop these relationships and investigate putting shows on in other locations outside of Durham.
- To make sure the local community is made more aware of the shows DST theatre companies put on and offer benefits to locals who regularly see our shows.

Website

- To improve the content available to members on our website to improve support.
- To update the website so it appears modern and professional.
- To update the website to ensure all aspects work to their optimum.
- To ensure that box office may be used by external companies.
- Not to lose any of the current functionality.

Facilities

- To improve the costume store through the purchase and collection of new costumes that may be used by any production under the DST banner.
- To improve the technical facilities in The Assembly Rooms and to update the technical provision to meet the more modern day demands, whilst ensuring it is future proof.
- To investigate and develop with various areas of the university provision additional rehearsal and performance spaces. This includes considering the provision of a studio theatre space that can be adapted to meet various shows needs, as well as investigating new technologies that could be implemented in this new venue.
- To investigate the provision to serve alcohol in The Assembly Rooms.
- To improve Box Office and put additional measures in place to streamline the system used for more popular shows.

Alumni and Community

- To improve our ongoing communication with Alumni.
- To offer more benefits to our Alumni and to the local community.
- To organize more Alumni events.
- To provide more DST socials to improve a whole society community feeling as opposed to being split by the theatre company you are most involved in.
- To improve links between DST and its subsidiary theatre companies, including our college links.



Testimonials

Whilst DST is very proud of what it achieves, no one says it better than our members. Below is a selection of testimonials from our members.

I have loved every production I have been a part of. I found auditions in first term quite stressful as it took me a while to get used to them - but in second term I really enjoyed being a member of DST.

-Phillipa Mosley

Durham Student Theatre has been brow. (trans, trad Scottish, 'excellent')

- Hannah Howie

DST has been the undoubted highlight of my time at Durham. It has consistently been the one area of my life here in which I have felt challenged, respected, surprised, provoked, entertained and fulfilled. I have met my greatest friends here, and it has influenced and aided the choices and opportunities available to me in my future career.

- Benedict Weaver-Hincks

I never expected to get involved with theatre, let alone theatre tech, at university. But DST was so welcoming and fellow members became my firm friends - now I can't imagine what university would have been like without it!

- Kate Jenkins

Having arrived in Durham with no theatre experience whatsoever I have had a brilliant experience meeting passionate and talented people and gaining opportunities in directing.

- India Furse

In a nutshell, one of the biggest parts of my university experience has been acting and consequently DST. I wouldn't be the woman I am now without it!

- Stephanie Jones

I consider myself unbelievably fortunate, as the rush for University meant I didn't consider Durham's theatrical opportunities at all. However, I lucked out, and DST has been the largest part of my university life. The experience, knowledge and connections you make are second to none, and there is no finer institution in Durham for progressive, creative and fiercely driven members. DST is something to be proud of, and I am proud, to have been a member and to be an alumnus. I firmly believe my Uni experience wouldn't have been nearly as fulfilling without it.

-Thomas McNulty



THEATRE THAT SPEAKS VOLUMES



A Durham Student Organisation
Managed by Experience Durham

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