



Van Mildert College
Durham University

MCR HANDBOOK

2021/2022

About Durham University

Durham University (legally the University of Durham) is a collegiate research intensive university in Durham, England, founded by an Act of Parliament in 1832 and incorporated by royal charter in 1837. It was the first recognised university to open in England for more than 600 years, after Oxford and Cambridge, and is thus described as the third-oldest university in England. As a collegiate university its main functions are divided between the academic departments of the university and its seventeen colleges. In general, the departments perform research and provide teaching to students, while the colleges are responsible for their domestic arrangements, enrichment activities and wellbeing. The university became a member of the Russell Group of British research universities in 2012.

The history of Van Mildert College

Van Mildert College (known colloquially as Mildert) is a college of Durham University. Founded in 1965, it takes its name from William Van Mildert, Prince-Bishop of Durham from 1826 to 1836 and a leading figure in the University's 1832 foundation. Originally an all-male college, it became the first Durham college to become co-educational in 1972 with the admission of female undergraduates. The accommodation blocks are named Tyne, Tees, Middleton, Derwent, Wear, Tunstall and Deerness, the latter two of which are fully en-suite. These are named after local rivers or reservoirs e.g., River Tyne, River Tees etc. The college arms are blazoned as "Gules two Scythe blades in saltire in chief the Cross of St Cuthbert Argent and for the Crest On a Wreath of the Colours in front of a Castle of three Towers Sable a silver penannular brooch proper the ends charged with Gilded Crosses of St Cuthbert." The scythes and the red field are taken from Bishop Van Mildert's episcopal arms; the cross of St Cuthbert is a common emblem of Durham City and University. The college generally uses only the shield of its arms for most purposes.

About Van Mildert College MCR

At Durham University, as well as a number of other prestigious universities in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and Australia, students are organised into common rooms depending on the academic degree they are pursuing. The Van Mildert College Middle Common Room (MCR) is the common room for postgraduate students affiliated to Van Mildert College. The student body of the MCR includes Masters, PGCE, and Ph.D. students both living in and out of college. The primary aim of the MCR is to represent the postgraduate community of the college and provide a friendly and supportive environment for postgraduate students within the college during their time in Durham.

1. MCR President's Greetings

Driven by Durham University's traditional collegiate system, Van Mildert College, commonly known as Mildert, organizes students into three main common rooms: the Van Mildert Junior Common Room (JCR) for undergraduate students, the Van Mildert College Middle Common Room (MCR) for postgraduate students, and the Senior Common Room (SCR) for staff, mentors, fellows and alumni.

The MCR at Van Mildert College aims to support a vibrant postgraduate community by furthering the interests and advancing the learning of the postgraduate students of the College.

Van Mildert College MCR has four main aims:

To maintain a vibrant, cohesive postgraduate community at the college.

To advance the academic skills of Van Mildert postgraduates.

To respect and protect the environment.

To act for the benefit of society at large.

These aims direct the MCR's program throughout the year. You can look forward to a full programme of events run by the MCR throughout the coming year, including social and environmental events, day trips around the North East, volunteering, research talks and dialogues, and more! We meet in the Bankside Room, located in Deerness. The Bankside Room offers an ideal space for Van Mildert College MCR members to socialise. MCR members also have access to the SCR's Prowse Room, a private well-equipped lounge located at the back of the college, and which has a TV, DVD player and a PlayStation, as well as free hot drinks for a period of time after meals. We are immensely proud and lucky to call Mildert our home, and we hope that through eating meals in the Ann Dobson Hall (available three times a day); studying in the Bradshaw Library (with beautiful views of the lake), Kent Room, and Elvet Hill House; socialising in the College bar (the award-winning student bar), and Grounds; and enjoying playing music in the Music Room, and Recording Studio, you will come to feel home at Mildert.

Social events in Mildert go a long way towards maintaining the sense of community Mildert is famous for. Most popular are our 'Formal Dinners'. Formal Dinner is a meal held at some of the oldest universities in the United Kingdom, as well as some other Commonwealth countries to increase interaction between academics, college staff, and students, and to enrich the students' overall learning experience. Moreover, look forward to quiz and international music nights, and college-wide parties to celebrate events such as Halloween, Holi, Christmas, Chinese New Year, etc.

Being family away from family is what makes the Van Mildert College MCR unique. The MCR is supported by an elected Executive Committee (Exec) composed of nine postgraduates: President, Vice President, Treasurer, Social Secretary, Secretary, Welfare Representative, International Students Representative, Livers Out Representative, and Web Master. The exec exists to serve the MCR community, organise events for its members, represent you to the College and University, and oversee the day-to-day running of the MCR. If you ever have any need of us, or wish to make comments or suggestions, we are always happy to receive them. Elections are held in the first term, and you are encouraged to stand for election if you so wish.

If you have any questions about life at Mildert and in Durham, please feel free to reach out to any member of the Van Mildert College MCR Exec, whose details can be found in this handbook. Please join our Facebook group, and follow our Twitter and Instagram pages to keep up to date with all our news and events. We look forward to meeting you soon!

Swaraj Verma
Van Mildert College MCR President

2. Locate Mildert



Colleges at Durham University are divided into two groups: Bailey Colleges and Hill Colleges. Bailey colleges are colleges located around city centre, while hill colleges are located south of the city.

Van Mildert College is one of the Hill Colleges. Mildert is:

- Five minutes walking from the Business School and the School of Government and International Affairs.
- Ten minutes walking from the science site and the Bill Bryson Library.

- Twenty minutes walking from city centre and the Tesco Metro (food shop).
- Twenty-five minutes walking from the train station and Maiden Castle Sports Park.
- Twelve minutes driving from Arnison Centre (out of town retail park).

Van Mildert College is also two minutes walk from a bus stop that can take you anywhere around Durham and neighbouring Newcastle upon Tyne, Stockton, and Middlesbrough. Nothing is very far away in Durham!

3. The Bankside Room



Located in the Deerness building, the Bankside room (often simply referred to as 'The MCR Common Room') is a space open for members of Van Mildert MCR to socialise, relax or work, 24 hours a day. Access to the MCR Room is added to members' campus cards when you become a member of the MCR (upon payment of a small optional charge - please see your Pre-arrival Handbook from the College for

more information). If for any reason you must leave the room, please ensure that the door and windows are locked.

The room's facilities include: a flat screen television, DVD player, PlayStation and a variety of board games and books.

4. MCR Membership



MCR membership fees are used to run and maintain the MCR. Your MCR membership allows you to take part in our vibrant community, utilize the MCR facilities, and enrich your experience at Mildert and Durham University.

Members of the MCR have access to a wide variety of facilities, privileges, and events. The facilities include the MCR Common Room (Bankside Room), a space for all MCR members to meet and socialise; and dedicated study spaces in Elvet Hill House, just across the road from the college, exclusively for use of Van Mildert postgraduates. MCR members also have priority in sitting on High Table during the college's Formal Dinners.

With regards to events, the MCR organises a range of events including, among others:

- Inter-MCR Christmas Formal
- Day trips around the North East
- Chinese New Year Party
- Wine Tasting
- Charity Quiz Night
- MCR Research Seminars
- Free college lunch on selected Friday's for livers out

Members of the MCR also automatically become members of the Van Mildert College Junior Common Room (JCR), the common room for

undergraduate students. Through their membership of the JCR, MCR members can:

- Attend events organised by JCR in college and, in some cases, receive preferential sign-up
- Get involved with college societies and sports teams
- Vote in MCR/JCR elections and stand for elected office
- Represent the MCR/JCR on college committees and through taking on unelected roles and supporting or organising MCR activity
- Make use of MCR and JCR equipment (musical instruments, sports, tech etc) and facilities.

To pay your MCR membership fee of £35 per year, please see the Postgraduate Pre-arrival Handbook sent to you by the College or click [here](#). Please note that this is separate to your membership of Van Mildert College. The MCR is the community of postgraduates run by students for students. We very much hope you will all join and make the most of what the MCR has to offer!

5. The MCR Committee

The Middle Common Room is run by a group of postgraduate students known as the MCR Executive Committee. Any full member of the MCR may run for office, with elections for most positions being held during October.

Positions on the Executive Committee are:

President: The leader of the Middle Common Room, they have overall responsibility for the conduct of all MCR affairs and for the implementation of all MCR decisions. The President is the main link between the college and its postgraduate community.

Vice President: Deputises for the President when needed and has responsibility for the upkeep of the Bankside Room (MCR Common Room).

Treasurer: The Treasurer is responsible for all fiscal matters pertaining to the MCR, managing reimbursements, making budgets and keeping track of accounts.

Secretary: Produces agendas and minutes for meetings, organises the termly Ordinary General Meetings (OGMs) and the yearly Annual General Meeting (AGM).

Social Secretary: Organises social events for the Middle Common Room and inter-MCR events for the wider postgraduate community.

Environment Officer: Coordinate environmental campaigns for the MCR.

Academic Development Officer: Responsible for promoting opportunities for postgraduates to develop academic skills. This includes running a mentoring scheme for undergraduate students, organising the MCR Research Dialogue series and the Lunch time talks series.

Welfare Officer: Maintains links to the college welfare system and talk and support, as well as running postgraduate specific welfare campaigns.

Communications Officer: In charge of the online presence of the MCR. The Comms officer runs the MCRs social media accounts, promoting events and sending out news, events and information via email bulletins and newsletters.

6. Useful Contacts

All matters relating to your admission and allocation to Van Mildert College should be directed to the **Postgraduate Coordinator, Sharon Bagnall**. Sharon will have been in touch with you recently regarding your membership of Van Mildert College and will also be the person to issue you with your Particulars of Offer (your legal agreement regarding accommodation if you have opted to live in College). You can contact Sharon by emailing vm.pg.newstudent@durham.ac.uk.

Other helpful contacts within the College include -

The College Officers

Prof. Tom Mole, *Principal*
tom.mole@durham.ac.uk

Dr Victoria H Brown, *Deputy Principal*
v.h.brown@durham.ac.uk

Student Support and Student Experience staff

Elizabeth Ryder, *Student Experience Officer*
elizabeth.l.ryder@durham.ac.uk

Jillian Turnbull, *Student Support Administrator*
Jillian.turnbull@durham.ac.uk

Van Mildert Student Support
vm.student-support@durham.ac.uk

The Middle Common Room

Swaraj Verma, *Van Mildert MCR President*
swaraj.verma@durham.ac.uk

6. Formal Dinner



Being the third-oldest university in England, there are various centuries-old traditions, customs, and practices that make Durham University rather different from any other. One of the Durham University traditions that has survived through the centuries is the practice of Formal Dinner.

Formal Dinner is a three-course meal held at some of the oldest universities in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, as well as some other Commonwealth countries. The Formal Dinner tradition is practised to increase interaction between academics, college staff, and students, and to enrich the students' overall learning experience. As Formal Dinner was created as a forum for camaraderie and discussion, conversation is not only permitted but highly encouraged.

At Formal Dinner, students, academics, college staff, and guests have to abide by long-standing set of conventional rules of personal behaviour and ethical code. At Mildert, Formal Dinner is held in the Ann Dobson Hall. The JCR sit at Low Table (i.e. the majority of the tables in the Hall) and the SCR and MCR members at High Table.

Formal commences at 7.00 pm sharp, when High Table enters the Ann Dobson Hall. While those at High Table enter, all those who are at Low Table stand. Following this, all members sit for the meal, served by College staff. Everyone is required to remain seated throughout the meal. After the meal, postgraduates retire to the SCR, MCR, or the College Bar.

The persistence and respect of these traditions, customs, and practices go a long way towards the preservation of Durham University's centuries-old identity and legacy. An in-depth guide to formals will be circulated before formals.

7. Academic Opportunities

The Van Mildert MCR offers a wide variety of opportunities to MCR members to support their academic excellence. These opportunities include:

The Research Dialogue Series

The VM MCR Research Dialogue series is held at least once per term (normally monthly within term time). It offers an opportunity for members of the Van Mildert MCR (whether PGR or PGT) to present on their own research and research interests. These tend to cover a very diverse range of subjects; with previous talks having come from the schools and departments of Psychology, Chemistry, Government and International Affairs, Mathematics, Philosophy, Geography and English. For more information, please contact the MCR Vice President, Beth Henderson at vm.mcrvp@durham.ac.uk

Conference Attendance Scheme

Grants of up to £250 are available to help MCR members to attend a conference which will enhance their academic career. Awards are available to cover conference registration costs, travel, accommodation or subsistence. Priority is given to those students who are presenting their own research and those without funding support for such activities. For enquiries about this funding, contact the MCR President (vm.mcrpresident@durham.ac.uk) or the Student Experience Officer, Liz Ryder (vm.development@durham.ac.uk).

Dimensions Programme

The Dimensions programme offers a range of opportunities to students which align closely with the Durham Inspired Award. Additionally the activities offered by Dimensions seek to enhance and develop a student's intellectual curiosity and personal effectiveness through the facilitation of student-led activities, the provision of a broad-ranging series of lectures, seminars and debates, and skills-based activities such as networking sessions, employability initiatives and our well-established work with the local community. The programme is based around three themes: engage and inspire, wellbeing and community, and find your future. Information about forthcoming Dimensions activities is sent to students regularly via email and bookings can be made via our online student portal, [Van Mildert College Student Connect](#). Enquiries about the programme should be directed to vm.dimensions@durham.ac.uk. There is also more information about Dimensions in your Postgraduate Pre-arrival Handbook.



8. Study Spaces



There are various places across the University and Durham available for students to study. At Van Mildert College our study spaces include:

- The Bradshaw Library, *Van Mildert College* (open 24hrs to Mildert students only).
- The Computer Room, *Van Mildert College* (open 24hrs to Mildert Students).
- Kent Room, *Van Mildert College* (open 24hrs to Mildert Students).
- Elvet Hill House, *opposite Van Mildert College* (open 24 hours

to Mildert postgraduates, collect key card from VM reception).

And across the wider University:

- The Bill Bryson Library, *Science Site* (open 24hrs during term times)
- PGR Study Room, *3rd Floor Bill Bryson Library, Science Site* (open 24hrs during term times).
- The Palace Green Library, *Palace Green* (open during the day to students

9. Student support and wellbeing

The Student Support Team at Van Mildert College is based in The Principal's Office. You can contact them via email or by booking an appointment using Student Connect (vm.studentconnect.durham.ac.uk). More information about student support can be found in your Pre-arrival Handbook and on the yellow poster included here. Additional sources of support within the University are also listed below. We encourage all students to speak up and seek support when needed!

Within the University...

University Counselling Service: The Counselling Service offers a confidential, high standard of service in counselling for those who are finding that their difficulties are hard to manage and/or affecting their studies. They are available all year round to registered students via self-referral. The Counselling Service are based on the ground floor of in the Palatine Centre, on the Science Site. To contact them call 0191 334 2200 or email counsel.service@dur.ac.uk.

Disability Support: If you have a recognised impairment, or are experiencing unexpected difficulties with your studies, please contact Disability Support to find out how they can help you. Their service is friendly and provides confidential support individually tailored to your specific needs. Email disability.support@durham.ac.uk for more information.

Student Immigration and Financial Support Office (SIFSO): The Student Immigration and Financial Support Office (SIFSO) provides advice for international students looking to Study at Durham and for those who are trying to extend their leave to remain in the UK to study and works with Departments across the University to ensure compliance with Home Office regulations.

Careers, Employability and Enterprise Centre (CEEC): The Careers and Enterprise Centre is able to support you in researching your career ideas, developing skills for employment, applying for jobs and further study and meeting potential employers.

Choosing and Registering with a Doctor: includes advice sent to all new students at the start of the year regarding registration with a doctor.

External support...

Nightline: is a confidential, non-advisory, non-judgemental, non-directive listening service, run by students, for students.

Samaritans: are available 24 hours a day to provide confidential support about whatever might be troubling you. They have branch in Durham on Sutton Street.

Rape Crisis: is a national charity with a freephone helpline there to support those who have experienced sexual violence. They offer a safe and non-judgemental environment where you can talk freely and confidentially.

Durham Students' Union Advice and Help Service: The Union's Advice and Help service provides free, friendly and independent advice and information to all Durham University students. Staffed by a team of professional and experienced advisers, they cover all main areas of student concerns including money, housing and academic issues. Advice and Help is independent from the University and all enquiries are dealt with in strictest confidence.

Students Against Depression: offers comprehensive, award-winning information and resources to help students identify low mood or depression and find a way forward.

101 - The police non-emergency number: 101 is the number to call when you want to contact your local police in England, Wales or Scotland - when it's less urgent than a 999 call. 101 is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

10. Durham Dictionary

Bailey	The geographical centre of Durham City surrounded by the River Wear including Cathedral, Castle and Bailey colleges		purple used by the university
CIS	Computing & Information Services	Porter	Porters are responsible for the maintenance of college and control the access to keys to Mildert spaces
DSU	Durham Student Union	SCR	Senior Common Room refers to the room and the group of staff and lectures that form the common room
Dunelm	Abbreviation for the Latin name for Durham, you can use this after your name when you graduate.	Sic vos non-Vobis	Van Mildert College's motto meaning: Thus do ye, Not for yourselves
DUO	Durham University Online - the University's online learning environment.	Stash	Souvenirs of your tenure in Durham, Mildert, or MCR, such as hoodies, mugs, pens, and badges
Easter	The holiday and third academic term	Summative	Academic work that counts towards your final marks
Epiphany	The second academic term		
Formative	Compulsory academic assignments that do not count toward your final degree mark		
Fresher	First-year undergraduate		
JCR	Junior Common Room is the student body of undergraduates. They similarly have a common room called the JCR.		
Matriculation	Ceremony during induction week where members are inducted to the university		
Michaelmas	The first academic term of the year		
Palatinate	General descriptor for various things in Durham and the specific shade of		

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