MINUTES OF THE GRADUATE UNION COUNCIL MEETING

23 April 2014
Meeting opened at 17.05pm

Present
Jerome Greenfield (St Catherine’s), Jaquelyne Poon (Churchill), Sarwat Baig (Sidney Sussex), Euianna van Gijn (Clare Hall), Raphael Proust (Magdalene), Nadine Tscacksch (Trinity Hall), Finbarr Leacy (Peterhouse), Elema Zezlima (Clare Hall), John Morgan (Downing), Ginja Godbole (Fitzwilliam), Matthew Grosvenor (Clare Hall), Alexis Kaminski (Churchill), Lindsey Askin (Queens’)

Apologies were received from Helen Hoogewerf-McComb and the Wolfson College representatives.

The President of the Graduate Union was in the Chair, with the Membership Services Coordinator serving as Secretary.

1. Minutes
The minutes from the last GU Council Meeting were provided to the Council for review, and were approved without change.

2. Actions from Previous Meeting
No actions arising from previous meeting.

3. Declarations of Interest
No declarations of interest were made.

4. Matters for Discussion

4.1 President’s Update
The chief focus remains on representing graduate students on University and intercollegiate committees; and on passing the new constitution within the GU.

The President has been heavily involved in a review of University governance, that the University was asked to undertake by the Higher Education Funding Council. This
exercise showed the University’s governance to be strong, but that questions remain around the Bursars’ Committee.

This has been progressed under the umbrella of the Governance Review, and a continuing dialogue between the Presidents of the Graduate Union, and the CUSU. Important progress has resulted, including the likelihood of greater information being provided to the presidents of the GU and of CUSU, who will be able to then engage with student communities in JCRs and MCRs.

There is now greater push for both University and College offers to be made earlier in the admissions cycle.

Code of Practice for Research Student’s, see minutes from the last meeting about the importance of it being a code of those who supervise research students, as well as for research students themselves.

Talks remain on going with the University Childcare Office, to restructure and properly resource the GU toddler Group, and related activities, to provide the strongest possible offering to student parents. Particular thanks to Padmini, the outgoing Families Officer, who has shown how much of a contribution it is possible to make on the Executive Committee.

There is going to be a consultation exercise on the shape of student representation in Cambridge, as evidenced by a discussion in the Senate House on 18 March on the Joint Report of the University Council and the General Board on student membership of the two bodies. More information will be forthcoming.

Recalibrate the GU shop, and website, especially the ‘about us’ section, ahead of a new team taking over.

It has been recommended that the University’s funding support to the GU via our Administered Funds bid, be increased to some £76,000, an uplift of slightly over £9,000. It has been very challenging to secure such a settlement in the prevailing financial climate, and also the GU’s recent history, and reflects considerable engagement with the University on behalf of the GU, and offers new opportunities for next year’s team.

4.2 Welfare and Rights Officer’s Update – in the WaRO’s absence, this is carried over to the next meeting.

5. GU Constitution

5.1 2014 Graduate Union Constitution

Backstory: 4th generation of MCR committees that have been involved in this process. Start of 2012 start revision of constitution: breakdown in relations last year; new team worked hard during meetings this summer to create a strong constitution which works in the context of a collegiate university and a separate body to represent graduate students. The Constitution was unanimously approved at the last meeting of the GU Council.
Given the all candidates and putative candidates withdrew form the election for 2014-15 GU President, the decision was taken to roll the referendum over until this term, to be held alongside the ballot for the Presidency. The business at hand in this meeting was not to reopen any part of the constitution, or the referendum question to be asked, but to decide how to bring it to a referendum.

It was proposed that online voting should occur on the 19 and 20 May, with a single paper ballot-box open in the Graduate Union on Mill Lane on 21 May. It was intended that the votes for the Presidency and referendum would take place concurrently. The GU trustees would form an Elections Committee to oversee both votes, with Chris Page the designated Returning Officer for the Referendum, and Richard Jones for the referendum.

A full timetable will be published, with important steps including nominations for candidates for the GU Presidency opening on Tuesday 29 April, and closing on 14 May. An Extraordinary General Meeting for the referendum would be combined with the GU’s Annual General Meeting for 2013-14, to take place on Wednesday 14 May.

5.2 Timetable going forward

A full timetable will be published, but important steps would include nominations for candidates for the GU Presidency opening on Tuesday 29 April, and closing on 14 May. An Extraordinary General Meeting for the referendum would be combined with the GU’s Annual General Meeting for 2013-14, to take place on Wednesday 14 May.

Council was asked to support this framework, with the votes cast as follows:

12 votes in favour; 0 opposed

The Elections Committee will now run the two votes within the given parameters.

6. Any Other Business

Members of GU Council were invited to consult with colleagues within their MCR committees and student bodies as to preferences for accommodation provision. Is there a desire to see room subsidies continue (to the benefit of those graduate students living in college accommodation); or is there support for a move towards ‘market rates’, with the additional revenue used to support all students in other ways.

This is currently under consideration within the University and Colleges, and will be placed on the agenda for the next GU Council meeting.

Date to Note: Wednesday 14 May (time tbc), for a meeting in the GU to combine the 2013-14 Annual General Meeting, and the Extraordinary General Meeting on the referendum and constitution.

Meeting Closed at 5.39pm