Graduate Representation: Vision and Strategy

Presented by the Graduate Union
13 January 2016
Overview: 5 questions

1. What is a graduate?
2. What do graduates need?
3. Why are these needs best met by a graduate union?
4. How does the GU meet these needs?
5. What is the GU’s strategy for improvement?
1. What is a graduate?
Graduates are...

- Proximity to faculty/college
- Exams/thesis
- >300 CTF students
- Spouse/partner
- ~8% have children
- Lab-based vs. solo
- Location throughout year
- Term of arrival
- Educational background
- Relationship with supervisor
- Need for storage
- Career
- Financial security
- Disability
- Immigration status
- Transport resources
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- 19% PGT
- 81% PGR
- ~56% male
- ~44% female
- ?% other
- 41% home
- 22% EU
- 37% overseas
- 87% full time
- 13% part time
- Non-academic commitments
- Drinking/non-drinking
- Teaching responsibilities
- Local/visiting
- Carers/dependents
2. What do graduates need?
Graduate needs

1. Representation – to the university, colleges, faculties

2. Community

3. Welfare support:
   a. Graduate-specific needs
   b. Support for marginalised groups

4. Services & practicalities
Community

- Research can be isolating – socially and geographically. (More a PGR issue.)
- Grads require community building and orientation to be fast and immediate, e.g. pre-arrival. (More a PGT issue.)
- Isolation also a problem for others in grad community e.g. 4th-years/mature, family.
- Grads’ major connection is to faculty – but community is not their purpose, we can’t expect faculties to take primary responsible for this.
- Due to isolation and time constraints, grads require central facilitation of meeting people with shared interests, backgrounds, etc.
- Community must be active through the year, including Long Vac and Christmas.
- Some of this can be done well by MCRs, but often is not – MCR effectiveness varies by college and by year. Grads often don’t connect strongly with colleges anyway.
SUAS data: Issues by student type 2014-15

Undergraduate and graduate students using the Service tend to exhibit different issue profiles. For example, the most common issues brought by undergraduates were mental health and exam-related issues (such as exam allowances), while graduate students were more likely to ask for advice relating to finance, in addition often having concerns regarding mental health and exams. Graduate students were also more likely than undergraduates to approach the Service with difficulties with a supervisor/their department, and student complaints, while undergraduates were more likely to raise intermission and difficulty with college.

(215 students)
Graduates should have cost effective, easy, accessible and fast services during their studies at Cambridge.

Services should be provided in a one-stop-shop environment. Grads do not have time to waste researching options for idiosyncratic semi-regular services (e.g. gown hire) or critical yet rare services (e.g. thesis binding).
3. Why are graduates’ needs best met by a graduate union?
Facts on the ground: MCR consultation

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

"A single central SU could represent the interests of grads and undergrads"  "A single central SU at Cambridge would be dominated by undergrads"  "Grads at Cambridge would not engage with an undergrad-dominated central SU"  "All else being equal, my MCR would prefer there to exist a central grad SU"
Facts on the ground: Oxford and York

- Oxford – one central union
  - Undergraduate issues dominate and it is difficult to engage graduates
  - Even with a specific graduate-facing role, it is challenging to instil a culture that focusses on graduate issues

- York – a separate graduate union
  - A separate union adds significant value to the graduate experience
  - The union works closely with the other central union (which represents all students), collaborating in a range of areas.
Operational independence

Institutional agility:

- Necessary to be responsive to needs of PGTs
- Specialist organisation: swift response to any emergent needs
- Appointing specialist officers, online meetings

Specialised operations, prioritising graduates:

- Branding
- Service hours
- Funding allocations, officer priorities
- “Corporate culture”, officer support
- Institutional memory

- Smaller sabb team works more efficiently, collaboratively, without sidelining areas

_N.B._ not the same as administrative independence (_i.e._ staffing)
Political independence

• Strategic focus / priorities of the Union
• Awareness of issues
• Maximises graduates’ confidence and engagement
• Graduate representation by diverse cross-section of graduates
• Whenever resources are scarce, there is some degree of competition between graduates and undergraduates in a zero-sum situation
• Not subordinate to wider organisational interests
  • In case of undergrad-grad conflict, two independent organisations cope better
4. How does the GU meet graduates’ needs?
How the new GU meets graduates’ needs

1. Representation – to the university, colleges, faculties
2. Community
3. Welfare support:
   a. Graduate-specific needs
   b. Support for marginalised groups
4. Services & practicalities
• **Representation:**
  - MCR re-engagement – very positive feedback so far
  - University, colleges, faculties committees
  - Officers for all types of graduate student identity, *e.g.* student parents – and (crucially) facility to swiftly create/disband these as and when required.
  - Include faculty reps (and faculty officers) in all our work, not just Council

• **Community:**
  - Has recently been a struggle to make most of central social space
  - Nevertheless: regular film nights, free yoga, parent-toddler mornings, Winter Vac activities, *etc.*
Welfare support: Current provision

• Graduate-specific needs:
  • Winter Vac activities, SUAS key supporter and ~50% of their activities are with grads (GU would like to contribute more than possible at present)
  • Enhanced health services (prescription collection/delivery, provision of NHS/non-NHS care e.g. sexual health screenings, sexual health deliveries)

• Marginalised groups:
  • Disabilities officer appointment in progress thanks to flexible Executive Committee structure. Graduate students with disabilities are under-provisioned and do not receive satisfactory support, and we have been addressing this.
  • Working with International Students’ Team on orientation activities (as well as providing our own supplementary events)
Services & practicalities: Innovations for this year

• Year round events, as exemplified by Winter Vac activities.
• Free yoga three times a week, including a disabled students only yoga session.
• Orientation events catering for the constantly arriving new students.
• Preliminary explorations for central storage facility, and drafting storage policy for Graduate Tutors’ committee.
• Saturday screenings – opportunities to make new friends.
• Trial provision of central prayer room.
• Prescription collection/delivery service.
• Solicited entires for display of graduate art in GU lounge.
• Eco-san provision.
• Sexual health supply and delivery to geographically remote MCRs (especially grad-only colleges) in collaboration with CUSU.
• Clothes swaps.
• Training for Faculty – equivalents of JCR/MCR roles (e.g. welfare officers).
• Working with careers service to address questions specific to certain identities.
• Collaborating with PPD to enhance their provision of graduate services, e.g. leadership event promoted by GU.
5. What is the GU’s strategy for improvement?
The GU’s strategy for improvement

1. More effective representation
2. Governance reform
   a. Vice-President
   b. Executive Committee restructuring
   c. Trustee Board restructuring
3. Collaboration with CUSU
4. Even more services & practicalities
More effective representation

• 1.5 sabbatical officers cannot possibly:
  • Represent graduate interests at >23 committees
  • Lead the GU (as an organisation/charity)
  • Engage with all students and MCRs
  • Run community-building activities, welfare support, and other important services

• Executive committee comprises volunteer officers, with other commitments — committee often incomplete

• However, addition of Manager role has made a monumental difference
Governance

• Vice-President:
  • January-December term of office, as opposed to July-July for President.
  • Option unique to graduates, facilitates continuity.

• Executive committee restructuring:
  • End volunteer administration – sabbs/staff to absorb Treasurer/Secretary duties.
  • Appoint *ex-officio*, from PdOC, NVS, CUSU autonomous campaigns *etc.*
  • Remainder elected in Michaelmas (for benefit of PGTs) alongside VP, or appointed as and when required.

• Trustee Board restructuring:
  • Need for more externals, but need to retain student control.

• Work on these matters closely with CCSSU
Collaboration with CUSU

• For many tasks, we recognise that collaborating with CUSU provides a better outcome for graduates:
  ‣ Use model of SUAS for successful collaboration
  ‣ Joint printing etc. services desk
  ‣ Explore means of creating joint policy, joint responses to consultations etc.
• Support staff network consolidation:
  ‣ Commercial and technical staff is a clear crossover.
  ‣ Confidentiality, defined loyalties, sensible outcome whenever relationship breaks down.
  ‣ e.g. Manager currently supports W&RO with plenty of CUSU activity.
• Better use of new shared space:
  ‣ Cafe / lounge, storage, meeting rooms
• Collaboration should be much easier now that we share a building.
• There is a lot of potential, but this can only work if CUSU is incentivised to cooperate.
Services & practicalities: Planned developments

• Large programme of social activities (e.g. for MPhils) once front door complete.
• Facilitate SUAS training to meet graduate demand for financial advice/signposting (pensions, mortgage, IFA).
• Housemate hunting.
• Skills sharing – online marketplace for money-poor skill-rich grads.
• Transport – lift sharing, bikes, car.
• Marketplace/Freecycle – second-hand goods etc.
• Collaborator hunting, jointly develop research ideas etc.
• More research-focused support/activities, e.g. facilitating grad-run seminars, 3 minute thesis competition.
• Ensure central location is fully equipped with assistive technology.
• Further support the Graduate Ethical Teaching Forum.
Thank you
1. What is a graduate?
   A. Graduates are a very diverse community which escapes generalisation.

2. What do graduates need?
   A. Representation, community, welfare support, services & practicalities.

3. Why are these needs best met by a graduate union?
   A. Facts on the ground, expertise & experience, operational and political independence.

4. How does the GU meet these needs?
   A. Representation, community, welfare support, services & practicalities.

5. What is the GU’s strategy for improvement?
   A. More effective representation, governance reform, collaboration with CUSU, even more services & practicalities.