GU Council – 18/05

1. Introductions
2. Updates
   a. Alessandro
      i. Continue to sit on a number of university task forces, bringing student concerns to the university.
      ii. Recent work around the issue of return to labs and work is ongoing. The situation is not changing yet, we are still at the stage of scenario planning for the future. The university is seeking to be clearer on this in the future.
      iii. Looking to expand the scope of the hardship funds including for international students and students post-submission
      iv. Accommodation has been a big issue with colleges and private landlords.
      v. Working with internal funding bodies and the university encouraging them to give funding extensions and improving the process for submission extensions.
      vi. Working with Daniel Zeichner including a meeting last week raising students’ issues including the coronavirus.
      vii. Work coming soon on fees and deferrals for masters students.
      viii. Work with libraries to support students in accessing work remotely, and this work is ongoing and libraries are keen to do it.
      ix. Requested that the University do equality impact assessments of their Covid-19 plans to see their impact on disadvantaged groups
      x. Working with GAO on communications with new students and a survey of incoming students.
      xi. Sandra, Robinson: Concern about how to reach a common agreement about returning students across colleges and the uni. People are worried there might be inconsistency here.
         1. This is something that the university is working on and there is cooperation on. We have flagged with the University that working with colleges will be important, and they have committed to include colleges and accommodation in future drafts.
         2. Stella: Some departments have communicated they will be opening in early June but this is not yet confirmed and will not happen until there is more information about safety.
         3. Alessandro: Where this happens please raise it with us so that we can act on it.
      xii. Akhila, Murray Edwards: There has been conflicting communication with students about when they should expect to return.
          1. SS: The university is collecting information from supervisors about what they would need to return safely, but this is not all of the picture and the decision to return will not be entirely with supervisors.
      xiii. Akhila: Questions about students returning to colleges to collect belongings. MEdwards have college staff packing up rooms and asking students not to pay to for shipping, but is this a common approach?
1. Alessandro: Please do let us know what different colleges are doing, but we are not sure about colleges are doing. We are happy to put together some best practice.

xiv. Benjamin, Wolfson: Best practice is complex and leaving belongings in rooms might not be the best approach for everyone. There is still no common policy about approach to students who are still in Cambridge. Colleges are making changes to rules to how students should live but it would be good if it was made more uniform.

1. Alessandro: Colleges did attempt to make a commonly agreed set of FAQs which was shared but colleges have autonomy so it is a challenge to ensure there is alignment. Last Friday all colleges were requested again to align.

2. The most updated information about specific guidance is available on the University FAQs website and the CUSU website

b. Stella

i. This week is mental health awareness week and there have been lots of resources produced around this including a lockdown journal, an event with the CUSU BME Campaign focussing on mental health and advocacy with a focus on supporting BME students.

ii. The University has recently launched the Big White Wall which was something we advocated for. The Big White Wall is a remote mental health service that lots of Universities have access to which provides forums, courses and access to professionals to support mental health.

iii. On coronavirus, have been attending university planning groups on this including the first meeting of the welfare task force next week.

iv. Raised a variety of issues with Daniel Zeichner including NUS campaign for a student safety net which includes a national hardship fund and fee refunds/debt cancellation for students affected by coronavirus

v. Have been working on student parents in libraries to get child-friendly spaces in libraries. Looking for contacts with more student parents to further understand students’ experience and build an evidence base. Will circulate more later.

vi. Benjamin, Wolfson: Learnt through Stella about the consultation on the UBus survey which could benefit Wolfson, Girton and Homerton. We are looking to promote this and hope the GU could promote the survey to its members too.

vii. Trinity Hall MCR: In case of a non residential Michaelmas, thinking ahead to what MCRs could do to welcome new students, is there more information about what might happen yet and is there scope for collaboration on this point.

1. Torkel, Girton: there has been some discussion and we would welcome this.

2. Akhila, MEdwards: Even if there is a residential term is may be socially distanced so it may be useful to plan virtual events anyway. This could have other benefits for accessibility of those events.

3. Alessandro: This is something the new Cambridge SU team will have to work on in a few months with relationship to freshers’week.

3. Cambridge SU student trustees
a. We are recruiting student members of the Board of Trustees for Cambridge SU. Applications are now open for these positions. We need one representative from the GU council to read applications and do one meeting in June to help choose the new trustees and make a recommendation to the Cambridge SU board.
   
i. Benjamin Remez, Wolfson, volunteered.

b. Being a member of a board of trustees is a valuable and rewarding experience. More information is available on the GU website about the role. It is a rare opportunity to gain this experience.

4. Cambridge SU Budget
   a. Alessandro talked through the budget presentation and explained a written version of the budget with commentary would be circulated later this term.
   b. Akhila, MEdwards: On the overall direction of the new SU, how will pushing forward on postgrad engagement be pursued.
      
i. Planning is currently ongoing internally into how we will move forward including the setting of a longer term strategy with the trustees and also operational planning for how we will make use of our new larger team to improve engagement. Covid-19 means these conversations are still a work in progress but we are determined that there will be a good conversation setting a strategy and learning lessons from the Graduate Union.
   
c. Benjamin, Wolfon: Will we vote on this or is it left to trustees?
      
i. This is approved by the trustees because legally the new SU is a separate entity to the GU so GU Council cannot approve its budget.

5. Surveys
   a. Currently working to learn more about students and their views. The main thing is the comprehensive Big Cambridge Survey which is a big asset to the SU and we would really appreciate your support sharing.
   b. We are also doing a flash questionnaire on the impact of covid-19 on students to give some quick support for the arguments we are making to the University about their planning around PG students.