Agenda
5.30 pm, Monday 29th June

Zoom Link:
https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84195264316?pwd=RURxL3cvQUpKT3VKS2VHbktEN EZzdz09

1. Objections to the Order of Items on the Agenda
2. Minute of the Previous Council Meeting (Paper 0620.B)
3. Matters Arising from the Minutes of the Previous Council Meeting
4. Reports from Sabbatical Officers and Officers of the Executive Committee
   a. Report from the President (Verbal Report)
      i. Flash Survey Report (Paper 0620.C)
   b. Report from the Welfare & Rights Officer (Verbal Report)
   c. Report from the Returning Officer (Paper 0620.E)
   d. Updated Budget for Cambridge SU 2020-21 (Paper 0620.F, for note)
5. Any Other Business
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, MEEdwards: 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.
GRADUATE UNION

FLASH SURVEY REPORT:
IMPACT OF COVID19 ON POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

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ABBREVIATIONS

UG - undergraduate
PG - postgraduate
UCU - University and College Union
PGT - postgraduate taught
PGR - postgraduate research
1. **INTRODUCTION**

Quantitative and qualitative data from the Flash survey offered an insight into the concerns of students during COVID19, especially in relation to the university response. Data presented below have been extracted on May 28th 2020, 7:58 am MDT. The Flash Survey was launched on Friday 15 May and gathered, at the point of writing, 847 responses in total, with a completion rate between 90% (627 responses) and 100% (220). Eleven questions (Q1 to Q11) were asked to the students, of which Q11 provided us with qualitative data (see Appendix). The first part of this report will present qualitative data analysis, and the second part will break down the quantitative dataset.

2. **QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS**

There were 220 responses to the open-ended Question 11 in the survey (*Do you have any additional comments, questions, or concerns you would like to share with the Graduate Union?*). These responses have been thematically analysed. Respondents highlighted a number of issues which have been divided into seven broad themes: communication and consistency; fees and funding; research and teaching; student welfare; accommodation; visa and immigration and graduation and Michaelmas 2020. Each theme is discussed below. Details in the responses that might reveal the identity of students have been removed.

2.1. **Communications and Consistency**

Students reported a general impression of inconsistency in the communication they received. This highlights the challenges for the University’s various structure such as colleges, departments, research facilities like laboratories and libraries to streamline coherent messages to postgraduate students.

“University wide communications and College communications = brilliant. Faculty communications have been poor and infrequent, very much felt unsupported from a faculty level.”

“The COVID-19 outbreak response has really highlighted the ’disjuncture’ between the University and Colleges at Cambridge. I witnessed different Colleges adopting wildly different approaches to the outbreak, with some providing far more support than others. Inequalities between Colleges is already an issue in normal times, but in moments like these it becomes particularly significant. I would have liked to see the University and Colleges take a more concerted approach to dealing with the crisis.”

Several students reported perceptions that Master’s and PhD students were a lower priority for the University compared to the undergraduate students. Official communication that explicitly stated “Master’s and PhD students were lowest priority” was cited.

“My research plans were completely changed because of the pandemic. I had to leave the UK suddenly and return to the [...] to be with my family and my research methodology no longer resembles what it did two months ago. My MPhil
program is supposed to end with the submission of my dissertation on August [...] and, in an ideal world, I would want the opportunity to have an extension on my dissertation and return to the UK once it is safe so that I could complete my in-person fieldwork [...]. I know the question of when the University will be reopen is still up in the air but none of the communications from the university or my department have indicated if this would even be a possibility. In the University’s response I feel the one-year MPhil students are being entirely forgotten.”

Master’s students have highlighted the lack of acknowledgement in University communications about the effects on Master’s research such as, significant changes in research questions and research methodology. The limited communication targeting Master’s students who feel that they are in most urgent need of it due to imminent exam/dissertation submission deadlines contributes to a sense of being neglected by the University.

Students are particularly worried about their future at the university and lack of transparent communication about the University and Colleges’ plan for the next year. They perceive this lack of planning as hindering their ability to make logistical arrangements of travel to Cambridge and their ability to continue with their research. The array of concerns included:

- Will PhD students be subjected to separate rule or will they have to follow the same advice as undergraduates or research staff?
- Will room contracts in college, especially for purposes of rent, begin once the student arrives in college or will the student be expected to pay for an empty room even when travel bans restrict them from coming to the UK?
- What will happen to belongings that are left in the room that cannot be shipped to the student’s address?
- Who will pay for return flights?
- Will the University ‘chip in’ on the cost of buying equipment required to enable students to work from home?

For Master’s students, the ability to plan quickly was deemed particularly urgent as articulated by the following student’s response:

“Very vague policies of the different colleges regarding the way actual Master’s will be able to finish their year at Cambridge (would we be able to come back in July if the situation gets better, would we be able to stay at least a few days at Cambridge to at least pick up our stuffs, etc.) I am talking as an international students who cannot make a return trip in one day at Cambridge.”

Furthermore, the University’s communication of reopening research facilities seems to have generated a divide between STEM and non-STEM students where the latter feel neglected. For example:

“I’m concerned that I’m hearing rumours of STEM students being allowed to return to their research before non-STEM students. Non-STEM students often need resources they can’t access remotely as well, I think a lot of us would be grateful if this rumour could be cleared up so we know what’s happening to us!”

Respondents showed vigilance toward the tone of messaging sent out by the University, colleges and departments. While students indicate a desire to be informed about the practical side of matters such as how their academic research will progress or how they will return back to the university, students are mindful of the empathy, care and humanity in communications sent to them. This scrutiny demands the University and Colleges to be mindful of the dynamics
of the larger social context within which education is delivered. These dynamics include but are not limited to: students' level of income, household constraints, their responsibilities towards their families and societies and their personal reaction to the pandemic. Two students' response below articulate this:

“...I have been very ill with covid-19 ... I was dismayed that the school of [name] were so tone-deaf to send everyone an email to say this pandemic ought to be an "opportunity" to be even more "productive" and they don't envision any need to extend deadlines or account for the enormous upheaval in peoples' lives. Very out-of-touch with reality. My college [...] has been very good, and I am grateful to them for all their assistance, understanding and guidance.”

2.2. Fees and Funding

The section below will discuss students' thoughts about funding extension, hardship funds and tuition fees.

Funding Extensions

Students have expressed an array of concerns and questions about funding extensions. While all respondents indicated that they would benefit from funding extensions for their PhDs, most are worried about whether they will be eligible for it if they are funded by non UKRI bodies such as their college, departments, Cambridge Trusts, Gates Cambridge and other funding bodies. Testimonies from students explain such instances:

“I am funded through a private enterprise [...] The enterprise may be out of business by the end date of my funding [...] I also do not think I will receive enough [hardship funds] to cover my expenses, even if I apply both to college and to the general hardship schemes.”

“I have funding from the European Research Council who haven’t said anything about an extension in funding.”

Respondents have called for consideration for funding extensions for first and second year PhD students in addition to final year students. Even though the University communication has highlighted that extensions will be granted to PhD students on a case by case basis, there is suspicion and fear that their applications for extensions will be denied in the future.

“..... By saying that funding will be considered on a "case by case basis" ensures that individual students themselves must take on the overwhelming bureaucratic burden of petition for our own individual cases, when the impacts of the pandemic are felt by all and thus, students can therefore be classified as a class impacted. The university is making it harder and more taxing for students, putting us at a further disadvantage and disenfranchisement in a time of significant stress.”

Hardship Funding

The responses indicate that students who are self-funded or funded by private bodies are most concerned about access to hardship funds. Statements showed that students have lost their jobs and/or they have no access to social security payments from governments. Respondents
therefore worried about how they can continue their PhDs and whether the hardship funds they receive will cover the costs of continuing their studies at the University. The responses below provide examples:

“The indirect impact of COVID on my research is that the economic crisis has reduced ... income, ...Because of this I will be struggling to find time to work on my PhD properly.”

“I am concerned that I might not have enough funds to sustain myself in Cambridge If I cannot return to my country by the end of June.”

**Tuition Fees**

Students have cited the severe ‘disruption’ to teaching, learning and research activity including the access to resources to justify a demand for reduction in tuition fees. Teaching was firstly impacted by the UCU strikes in Lent term. The COVID19 crisis that soon followed resulted in teaching moving online. However, as the University shut down, most students were forced to move to locations outside Cambridge/UK. Students perceive the lack of access to research facilities like laboratories, libraries, college events, class trips, peer group learning and networking, among others, a significant detriment to their overall university experience. Thus, they believe the high fees for postgraduate education, particularly for international students, is no longer justified. Students in Master’s degree courses particularly reported feelings that their tuition fees are no longer proportionate to their truncated university experience. Examples of such responses are provided below:

“Given the circumstances, I think the university are for the most part doing their best. It would be easy for me to be angry that I am missing XYZ, but given the circumstances most of this is out of the universities control. I am however, frustrated that I am continuing to pay the full tuition fee when I lost out on 4 weeks of lectures/contact time with supervisor due to strikes already, none of which were rescheduled. ..... I also haven’t been able to access all the books I need to online (And I think we can all agree reading ebooks is just not the same); when we have had lectures, it is really hard to engage in discussion with students and staff about research which is always really helpful. ..... If this is something other students feel the same way about, especially for the one year students who won’t have the time made up, it would be really good to see the graduate union push for some kind of compensation.”

“...I am pursuing [an] expensive and highly intensive course for 9 months of study and depends a lot on collaborative learning experience. The experience is highly impaired and course burden has substantial increased with all exams getting converted into ....assignments. It’s taxing, considering current situation and clearly reflects that University has not given much attention to the intensity. In addition, the job market iss impaired, resulting in a high loss of perceived value [of the degree]. I request a fair consideration by University for a part refund to us.”

“...I have gone into debt to be able to pay the university fee. Now, I am frustrated that almost half of my time in Cambridge was cut due to the Industrial Action and the Covid-19 pandemic. I would like a partial refund of my university fees.”
2.3. Research and Teaching

The section below will discuss responses related to academic issues. These include resource access, fieldwork, supervisors, teaching standards, assessments, submission extensions and post submission/viva.

Resource Access

Three major areas were highlighted by responses in terms of resource access. The first was that students experience difficulty and setbacks due to their inability to afford equipment/technology to do their work from home. A student’s response provides an example:

“...I don’t have a laptop and I am typing my final essay on Google Docs from my phone.”

The second was students’ inability to access library resources such as borrowing books, accessing archives. Several responses illustrate this:

“... I can work remotely (in the main) but I am beginning to come up against primary research resources in archives and libraries which I need to access but can’t. I think the University and colleges need to concentrate on getting libraries open as soon as possible - it would be relatively easy to design simple social distancing measures for both staff and readers.”

“My only concern is libraries are opened as quickly and safely as possible and/or greater online resources, esp. foreign languages.”

“The lack of e books had cost me a fortune as I’ve had to buy copies for myself to continue. My library can’t always get all the titles are some are pretty niche.”

The third was the setbacks to work suffered due to the inability to access laboratories and uncertainties about the re-opening of facilities. For example:

“..... There is a general consensus that first year PhD students can just fill the time by writing their first-year assessment but this does not take into account the work that had to be stopped abruptly which will lead to major delays into getting things running again. Also first year students have the less amount of data so it’s easy to run out of things to do”.

“The biggest impact for me is related to uncertainty: will research buildings (and which ones) reopen in the next future? Will they not?”

Fieldwork

Respondents were generally concerned about the lack of communication to acknowledge the centrality of fieldwork for research projects:

“So far the information we have received about accounting for lost research time and planning for a return has been very focused on access to labs and we haven’t had any guidance about postponed/cancelled fieldwork. I understand that there is a lot of uncertainty around when this will be possible again but it
would be reassuring at least to have an acknowledgement that the university / department [...] are aware of delays of this type as well.”

Students are also worried about the lack of clarity about when and how they can conduct their fieldwork. This clarity is particularly pertinent as the inability to conduct fieldwork has led to significant restructuring of research projects for Master’s students. As one student explained, “My research methodology no longer resembles what it did two months ago.” Moreover, delays or cancellation of fieldwork for PhD students can have equally detrimental effects such as bring unable to collect any data on the research topic.

Supervisors

Supervisors are central to guiding the academic progression of postgraduate students through the uncertainty generated by the COVID19 pandemic. Some responding students have directly expressed concern about unresponsive supervisors as shown by statements below:

“No man’s land! .... can’t get supervisor to respond to emails about essential changes to make research methods (now remote). Have continued without support…”

“I feel abandoned by my supervisor who is extremely unresponsive. Sometimes it takes two weeks for her to reply to an email.”

Others have described academic concerns which seems to indicate that they have received little guidance from the supervisor. They have cited concerns about being unable to obtain required material from fieldwork or datasets and worried about “how to get through” or that they are “trying to find a way”.

Teaching Standards

The responses show differing opinions about online teaching. While a student described “…the teaching standards [to] have dropped by being online” another stated that online teaching has increased accessibility for students:

“Online lectures and talks should not revert to classroom-only post-pandemic. This has always been exclusionary and disenfranchising to part-timers.”

Assessment

The majority of concerns related to assessments were expressed by Master’s students. They worried about the lack of safety net in conjunction with the unrealistically high expectations for standard of assessed work, lack of clarity about how colleges will administer and invigilate exams and obtaining final transcripts without marks/grades. The responses below provide examples:

“MPhil programs are not creating no detriment policies, which does not take into account significant changes to work due to mental health, lack of access to important resources, and other extenuating circumstances.”

Students examined by thesis also highlighted the lack of clarity in communications about assessment. The statement below provides an example:

“We had an email from the university saying this impact on our research would be accounted for with our thesis and vivas. How will this happen? The
longer this goes on do we get more compensation and more lenient examining of our thesis? Will external examiners be made aware of the situation Cambridge has?”

Submission Extension

There is consensus in the responses that due to changes in working environment and limitations in accessing resources, the departments must extend submission deadlines. The responses below highlight this issue:

“It’s difficult to keep house when everyone’s home all day, home school [...] and finish writing a thesis. My writing productivity has dropped dramatically, simply because I’m interrupted so much and a great deal of my mental energy goes into making an entirely home-based existence work for my family. I wish I could have an automatic 6-month extension of all my deadlines, with no penalties. I’m still working and making progress ... it’s just very slow.”

“Extremely concerned about lack of changing deadlines for major submissions when it was no longer possible to conduct fieldwork. Department was extremely unhelpful and has emphasized the great uncertainty without responding to external pressures we’re facing (beyond having to adjust major research plans in response to COVID-19 related lockdown).”

Students also indicated that the extension of deadlines need to be an ongoing consideration in the future as the University looks to reopen its research facilities. This is because students’ access to resources is likely to be reduced and productivity will be negatively affected:

“Coordination with supervisors is affected in a major way. Further, due to the lockdown of the research facilities lab-based work as of now is not happening at all. Even when the institutes get opened up again, working in shifts for the foreseeable future will have a considerable delaying effect on lab-based research work, which my degree is based on. It would address a lot of the uncertainty that me and others in my situation have, to know that there will be extensions to our degree time and funding to compensate for the time lost.”

Post Submission/Viva

Students reported concern due to lack of clear guidelines and communications about viva arrangements and results. The three responses provide examples:

“We had an email from the university saying this impact on our research would be accounted for with our thesis and vivas. How will this happen? The longer this goes on do we get more compensation and more lenient examining of our thesis? Will external examiners be made aware of the situation Cambridge has?”

“.... a delay in receiving the report from my viva has really affected the start of a new job and made that transition quite difficult and even more so as I was not able to plan when I would receive that report and how long it will take degree committees to approve my correction once I submit them. It feels like deadlines for me have not changed at all and I am still held to the strict deadlines but that nobody else in the university needs to meet the deadlines
that they would normally have in the process of a viva, more communication with students would alleviate some of these feelings I think.”

Furthermore, students reported their own set of financial hardship suffered due to the university’s policy to withhold hardship funds and other forms of support to those who have finished their viva. Respondents reported perceptions of being neglected by the university. For example:

“The university seems to have abandoned any responsibility towards students post-viva, regardless of the outcome of their viva. Funding is denied, even when pre-covid it was available. There is minimal support through institutional links - students can no longer even get an (exploitative) TES contract, as hiring has been completely frozen. Students cannot move on with their lives, as everything has been suspended (except, of course, rent payments). Students in this situation have been left in limbo - apparently not quite students enough for the university bureaucracy, but inhibited from becoming anything else.”

“Please do consider funding for those who finished their viva under lockdown. We are stuck! I need financial support in visa fees and no one can help.”

2.4. Student Welfare

This section will discuss responses related to disability and mental health, safety concerns and caring responsibilities.

Disability and Mental Health

The consistent issue highlighted by students is that the pandemic has taken an emotional tole which in turn adversely affects their productivity. Several student accounts provide examples:

“Productivity is at an all time low, and the stress of exams makes life extremely difficult when no studying has been done due to mental health issues.”

“While my research is not directly impacted, I am finding concentrating very difficult.”

“The emotional stress, and impact this has on productivity should be considered as we move forward. Incl. both concerns relating directly to COVID, such as illness/family concerns, but also other stressors like the uncertainty, difficult working environments, family difficulties/strain of living at home etc. It’s nice to be told not to worry if we’re being less productive, but this is only reassuring in so far as practical adjustments will be made accordingly.”

Students who had pre-existing mental health conditions and disabilities described how significant hardship has been posed by the pandemic. By their accounts it appears that existing institutions and structures have failed to adequately support them. The university and colleges needs to increase resources of the DRC and UCS services, especially now, even though we do not have clarity on what next terms are going to. As flagged with committees of the University (e.g. Students’ mental health and wellbeing), for non-medical health support, the DRC is
delivering much more work during COVID19 than predicted, a +30% help than they were last year.

“Part-time, mature students who have intermitted twice in the past find they haven’t a form which really expresses their situation. I have dyslexia and have been totally overwhelmed with the endless cover every possible permutation affecting students without focusing delivery of information on the specific group confusing and time consuming to read. I still don't know exactly which forms to complete even after approaching those who make the rules and uphold them. Also I have not been able to work on my thesis for weeks. I am shielding alone without a decent phone or internet - it being so unreliable that I am having to make freedom of information requests of the providers and BTOpenreach and examine their legal responsibility to provide a reliable service. There are other issues I have had to deal with involving endless hanging on the ends of phones and admin because of being unable to leave my home due to the crisis.”

“The DRC and university response for disabled graduates has been shocking. Even my department, supervisor and college, all of whom know I am disabled, seem to show no interest in helping except to suggest I should de-register by the head of my PhD program. It's like they just wanted to get rid of me. DRC can't do anything. Trying to work with college who just appointed a welfare officer and she has been the best. In the past my college have been good, even when it's not their responsibilty or job.”

Students were particularly critical of funding bodies dismissing mental health concerns as demonstrated by the response below:

“[...] had a meeting about AHRC funding extensions, where they relayed to us the 5 categories the university (and the relevant internal bodies) are using as acceptable reasons for delays to research - with regard to possible funding extensions. Many of us in the Zoom were shocked that 'Mental Health', namely stress/anxiety related to the pandemic and resultant inability to concentrate or focus, something I gather is affecting MANY grads, wasn't in these reasons/categories (although category 'e' is 'illness', there's clearly quite a big different between clinical anxiety, and this form of stress/anxiety).

Safety

Respondents were mostly worried that the University may force them to go back to buildings and research facilities before they felt safe doing so.

“I'm concerned about the rushed reopening of some labs and departments. There is no contingency plan/guideline if someone is infected with coronavirus in the same workplace.”

“It is crucial to minimise pressure in returning to attend laboratories or university events in person. The pressure to disclose being in a risk group, as well as pressure for someone not in a risk group but who generally likes to be careful and might have a fragile health is very difficult to handle. I think it is important to avoid any discrimination based on health or on how careful different personalities are.”
International students highlighted the risks of travel to the UK including concerns about mandatory quarantine and the possibility of being forced to leave the country if there is a second wave of the pandemic. The response below provides examples:

“I am currently outside of the UK, with my family, and have concerns returning too early to Cambridge because of the travel/flight itself, the two week quarantine (I have no extensive social network and no family in the UK) and only be able to go back to the lab for few hours a week due to social distancing, as well as the possibility of a second shut down in case the infection rate increases again. I think there should be a stepwise plan of students getting back to work, UK resident first, then students currently in Europe and then students from the rest of the world; eventually setting priority to final year students.”

Furthermore, a need was identified for the university to consider the safety of students with underlying health conditions while undertaking its future planning:

“I am in a high risk group due to chronic illness and therefore have to shield. I think it is also important for the university to know that there might be students who are more vulnerable despite their young age when they plan for the future.”

Caring Responsibilities

Many postgraduate students juggle family responsibilities and employment (particularly part-time students) with their studies at Cambridge. COVID19 has added caring responsibility on to students. Respondents have described difficulties in balancing the demands of academic work with their role as care givers. There is a call to consider the difficulties faced by students who are pregnant at this time as they may not fall into the caregiver category at this time but “seriously impacts [their] physical and emotional ability”. Below are some examples:

“My [spouse] has Covid-19..... I had to delay submission of my First Year Report and have yet to apply for an Extension .... As a result of [my spouse’s] illness and shopping shortages around where we live in [location], I was unable to progress my report. I have sufficient data that I collected from field work. Now that my [spouse] is getting better I can focus on my research but will need an extension.”

2.5. Accommodation

The concerns for accommodation consisted of anger at how students were treated by the college at the onset of lockdown and worry about future housing. A student described a particularly difficult situation of being forced to move out of college and becoming “essentially homeless” as their country went into lockdown. Due to the need to support their family, the student had to intermit and find a job. The student has asked their college whether it is possible to apply for accommodation for several months so they can finish their PhD. Yet the college is non-committal about letting the student enter the room ballot. This experience is summarised as:

“....... Kicking graduate students out of the place they have been told to call home with only a few days notice is just another example of a system biased
to the needs of privileged undergraduate students with financial support. Coming to Cambridge for a PhD was a massive mistake."

“I am worried that my college won’t let me return to Cambridge (I live in college accommodation) even when the labs reopen, due to how they have communicated with us.”

As many students left Cambridge in a rushed manner their belongings are in college facilities. Students are concerned about the storage and access to the belonging they have left behind. The following response provides an example:

“It would be helpful to have more clear information on whether or not we can extend the time which colleges will allow us to store possessions in rooms that we cannot clear due to being stranded abroad.”

Respondents highlighted the lack of communication from colleges and the University about whether they would provide accommodation in the future. They also sought clarity on issues of whether/how their college will support international students during the mandatory 14 day quarantine upon arrival into the UK. The following responses provide examples:

“I would like the University to allow returning to college accommodation for students who left Cambridge, since my lab [name] is opening ..and my work will be further delayed if I can't return to Cambridge.”

“I am extremely concerned about the likelihood of having to self-quarantine when research students are allowed to return from abroad - I would be reassured if the University committed to provide resources (financial and otherwise) if Colleges are unable (or unwilling) to provide adequate spaces. (In addition to plane tickets and other unanticipated costs, a two-week hotel stay, for example, would be financially crushing.)”

“Please encourage the colleges to publish their plans for allowing postgraduates to return to accommodations should the situation allow. Currently those of us who left in a rush have no idea whether we can return this summer or not, and if we can how the colleges will deal with accommodation and importantly quarantine support for international returners.”

2.6. Visa and Immigration

Respondents have raised two issues pertaining to visas and immigration. Firstly, the call for longer post study visa extensions in light of the difficulties to seek a job in the present climate:

“Graduating in this climate has severely limited job prospects in the UK for international students. To stay in the country, a sponsorship from an employer is needed before our current visas run out. The government has introduced a 2-year post-study work visa but unfortunately those graduating this year are not eligible for it. If something can be done at the national level to make 2020 graduates eligible for this scheme, a lot of the graduands would be very relieved.”

Secondly, there is a call for clearer procedure on intermission for Tier 4 students:
“...Please ask the international students office to come up with clearer intermission guidelines as they relate to tier 4 and leaving the UK. If a student is still in Cambridge and cannot return home due to closed borders and might want to intermit, how can the university provide support when after the intermission application, the home office will ask the student to leave the UK within 60 days?”

2.7. Graduation and Michaelmas 2020

Students have asked for clear communication about how graduation will take place. Concerns have also been raised about the possibility of deferring admissions next year and there is a call for more information about what students can expect Michaelmas term to look like. The examples of responses are provided below:

“It has been very frustration that there has been no information about graduation, which is today. Seems there will not even be virtual recognition, and no opportunities to visit campus with my family and participate in a future event once I graduate today.”

“Thank you for all you do, GU. As an international student with a conditional offer to continue onto the next degree in September, I would find it very helpful to learn Cambridge’s decision about having classes online or in person in Michaelmas term 2020 as soon as possible. While the situation is evidently very uncertain, I hope Cambridge will not decide / announce the decision too late, because this impacts international students heavily (given visa applications, etc.)”
3. QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative data, available in Tables 1 and 2 below, is unpacked in the present section, with a special emphasis on data concerning the impact of COVID19 on degree completion timelines, levels of satisfaction and equality profiles.

In terms of types of courses, of the 847 respondents, 69% were PhD and 31% were Master’s students (i.e. 10.9% PGT or Taught, e.g. MA or MBA; and 19.9% Research Master’s, e.g. MPhil). In terms of years of study, one year only course (23.46%) and 1st year students (23.58%) represent the majority of postgraduate student respondents, followed by 2nd year (22.87%), 3rd year (16.00%) and 4th year or more (14.10%).

Figure 1. Percentage of respondents to the Flash Survey per type of courses.

3.1. Impact on degree completion timelines and extensions.

A large portion of respondents (41%) have pointed out that they have experienced a major delay or major disruption to their degree completion timelines. This was broken down into the survey into three types of major delay or major disruption, including:

- Delay and major change of research strategy - I can work remotely, but I have had to change the direction of my research because I can no longer access certain resources (lab, field sites, archives, etc.). (20%, 191)
- Major delay - same as above, but in addition, I have lost a significant amount of time, e.g. because I had to discard samples, abandon studies before completion, etc. (11%, 105)
- Major disruption - I cannot work remotely because my research requires resources (lab, field sites, archives, etc.); (10%, 92)

This group is followed by students who have experienced delays and changes of research strategies (35%), more specifically those students who agree on the statement, “My progress is delayed because I’m limited to background reading/data analysis/writing, but little work on my main research priorities has been done”.

"GU Flash Survey Report: Impact of COVID19 on Postgraduate Students
Alessandro Ceccarelli, GU President 2019-20"
The above figures sum up to a total of 76% of respondents who experienced significant and major delays and disruption. The fact that such disruptions are remarkably widespread goes against the position of the University to have a case-by-case approach to extensions, especially of submission deadlines.

Given the above, the University should embrace a blanket approach to extensions of submission deadline during COVID19. Other institutions (e.g. KCL) have granted a blanket extension of 3 months to all postgraduate students. This would be quite straightforward to do, notwithstanding the possibility of a large number of records needing to be manually updated. Whilst this could serve to reassure final year students, especially international students, but also 1st and 2nd and 3rd year students. The Graduate Union believes that a similar approach could also be used to funding extensions, given the large scale of delays and disruptions identified by the survey.
3.2. Satisfaction and equality profiles

Postgraduate respondents have also pointed out that the level of satisfaction with the response of the University to COVID19 was constantly low, between 50-55% across courses and years of study. Research Master’s students in particular have reported a concerning low level of satisfaction (c.53%), with ‘one-year-only course’ disproportionately unsatisfied with the University response (see Figure 3).

The low level of satisfaction overall seems to characterise the whole postgraduate student community, but certain sections of the population have reported a particularly strong negative response. There appears to be a correlation between certain students with protected characteristics and the lowest level of satisfaction. These include, but are not limited to, BAME students (52%), students with disabilities (51%) and students with caring responsibilities (53%). This correlation seems to follow a similar trend of an overall lower level of satisfaction of these groups observed in other surveys (see GU Mental Health Survey 2019, and GU International Student Experience Report 2020). Students with disabilities have reported the lowest level of satisfaction with the university response to COVID19.

On the impact of COVID19 on BAME students, phenomena such as Brexit and the recent COVID19 pandemic have exacerbated targeted racism and violence against minorities such as African-Caribbean, Black, Asian and European communities. For instance, a January 2016 survey on the impact of Brexit showed that 71% of people from ethnic minorities faced discrimination, an increase from 58% reported in previous years[1].
Following the COVID19 pandemic, on May 2020 the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres\cite{2} said that “the pandemic continues to unleash a tsunami of hate and xenophobia, scapegoating and scare-mongering” and urged institutions to “act now to strengthen the response against the virus of hate.” It is likely that with protective measures like social distancing changing the nature of human interaction, discrimination and harassment may emerge in newer forms, including being exacerbated on online platforms. These types of considerations should be included in an inclusive university response.

Particularly concerning is also the correlation between low level of satisfaction and sexual identities (see Figure 5), in particular gay, lesbians and queer students have reported. There are guidelines\cite{3} on COVID-19 and specific impact on LGBTI people and what authorities and institutions should be doing to mitigate impact, which could be implemented by the task forces.

We note that the sample sizes when broken down by demographic characteristics are in some cases quite small, however it is concerning to see a pattern of lower satisfaction for students with protected characteristics or who are caregivers across all different breakdowns. Combined with the context noted elsewhere in this analysis, our view is that further investigation of and action on the impact of Covid-19 on equality is warranted.
In order to tackle issues of inequalities and lower levels of satisfaction among students with protected characteristics, Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) \(^4\) of the COVID19 strategies and policies of the University should be undertaken as frequently as possible, and the resulting EIAs reports should be made public. Senior consultants of the Equality and Diversity section of the University should be more involved in strategic meetings of the University, and papers should be circulated to them for EIAs.

Figure 5. Level of satisfaction correlated to sexual orientations.
### Table 1. Questions and responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Q1. Are you a Master or PhD student?</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>69.26%</td>
<td>579</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Master (Taught, e.g. MA or MBA)</td>
<td>10.89%</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Master (Research, e.g. MPhil)</td>
<td>19.86%</td>
<td>166</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>836</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Q2. What year of your course are you in?</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>One year only course</td>
<td>23.46%</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1st year</td>
<td>23.58%</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2nd year</td>
<td>22.87%</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3rd year</td>
<td>16.00%</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4th year or more</td>
<td>14.10%</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>844</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Q4. Do you identify as BAME (Black, Asian and minority ethnic)?</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>23.12%</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>71.51%</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
<td>5.36%</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>839</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Q5. Are you a carer or do you have caring responsibilities?</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>12.47%</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Not</td>
<td>82.07%</td>
<td>691</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
<td>5.46%</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>842</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Q7. Do you consider yourself to have a disability?</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>12.46%</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>82.68%</td>
<td>697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
<td>4.86%</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>843</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Responses to Q9: How would you rate the response of the University to issues that have affected you during the COVID19 outbreak? Please rate from 0% to 100% satisfied using the slider.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Minimum (%)</th>
<th>Maximum (%)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>57.51</td>
<td>26.43</td>
<td>698.58</td>
<td>796</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:


[4] Equality Impact Assessment (EIA). The EIA is the University’s mechanism for undertaking equality impact analysis of policies or functions relevant to the Public Equality Duties (Equality Act 2010). The Process involves the analysis of information and feedback from protected groups and others -info available at: https://www.equality.admin.cam.ac.uk/equality-diversity-cambridge/equality-impact-assessment-eia
GRADUATE UNION

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EXPERIENCE REPORT

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- **UG** - undergraduate
- **PG** - postgraduate
- **PGT** - postgraduate taught
- **PGR** - postgraduate research
- **UK** - United Kingdom
- **EU** - European Union
- **EEA** - European Economic Area
- **WP** - Widening Participation
- **HE** - Higher Education
1. INTRODUCTION

International students benefit the UK culturally, economically and socially during their time in education and beyond. International students are part of British society, contributing to the diversity of people and culture in UK institutions and society. This report stemmed from the concern that European and overseas students, compared to “home” students, have a lower level of satisfaction and experience a range of issues which negatively affect their success at the collegiate university. Issues highlighted in this paper were reported by international students to student representatives including the Graduate Union (GU), Middle Combination Rooms (MCRs), faculty representatives and the Students’ Union Advice Service (SUAS). The paper also includes views collected from university and college staff working with international students. This paper thematically reports major issues and provides suggestions to address them.

1.1. The UK context

The UK has a long-standing advantage in providing education to international students based on the importance of English language in the global economy, the high quality of the educational courses generally offered, and employment opportunities. There are over 750,000 students who come to the UK to study each year – in higher and further education, and in independent and language schools. Some come for short English-language courses, others for PhDs at the frontiers of scientific research.

Universities are one of the largest sectors in many local economies; they play a vital role in research and innovation in the UK economy, and international students also offer economic benefit, including cross-subsidising the education of domestic students and research. A report from the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) points out that many universities make use of higher international fees to further subsidise courses for UK and EU students, as well as to plug shortfalls in research budgets. As Nick Hillman, HEPI director and the author of the report, clearly pointed out, UK universities subsidise teaching and research by using the “surplus on teaching international students”. On average, international students pay around £5,100 per year more than it costs to educate them, around £4,250 of which typically goes towards universities’ research budgets. Income from international students is far too often the main concern of universities and Higher Education Institutes. The HEPI 2019 report has previously shown the tax and National Insurance payments of just one cohort of international students who stay in the UK to work after their studies amounts to £3.2 billion. The

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4 N. Hillman, From T to R revisited: Cross-subsidies from teaching to research after Augar and the 2.4% R&D target, HEPI, 2020.
Universities UK 2017\textsuperscript{6} report shows that international students generated £25 billion to the UK economy in 2014-15.

In the context of the UK leaving the European Union (EU) the UK Government has stated its intention to develop a new immigration system. This provides an opportunity to further demonstrate the contribution that international students make to the UK and to ensure that the new system supports this. According to UCAS\textsuperscript{7}, of student applicants domiciled in the EU, the highest numbers are from France, Italy, Poland, Spain, and the Republic of Ireland. EU applicants accounted for 37.7% of all non-UK applicants in 2019, down from 39.3% in 2018. This continues the downward trend since the 2016 referendum.

In recent times there has been substantial focus on aspects of the UK’s policy on international students\textsuperscript{8}. The Migration Advisory Committee (MAC)\textsuperscript{9} has looked in detail at immigration-related aspects at the Government’s request. The Higher Education Commission (HEC)\textsuperscript{10} has looked at some aspects of the UK’s international competitive position in higher education. The UK Government and Universities UK International (UUKi) have been working on a new Global Graduate Talent Visa and Global Talent route\textsuperscript{11} in the context of competitors’ post-study work offerings. There are no grounds for complacency – although international student numbers have risen in recent years, the UK’s overall education sector has fallen slightly and other countries are more active in access and widening participation.

1.2. The Cambridge context

The city of Cambridge hosts a high number of young adults and students compared to other districts, a large number of which come from outside the UK, contributing to its vibrant international character. In 2009, more than 60% of the city of Cambridge’s population was aged 25 years or older\textsuperscript{12}. That is low by comparison with the other districts which show proportions around 70% each, which can be explained by the large student population within the city. In 2016-17, the combined University of Cambridge (21,656) and Anglia Ruskin University Cambridge Campus (9,425) student roll was c.30,000.

The University of Cambridge aims to be a global institution embedded in the city fabric. International students represent c.42% of our student population, c.65-70% of postgraduate


\textsuperscript{7} UCAS – 2019 International Insights, available at: https://www.ucas.com/file/320131/download?token=AfU7rqhw

\textsuperscript{8} Please note that policy on Higher and Further Education is devolved in other parts of the UK, so policy relating to students – for the purposes of this paper – may relate solely to those studying in England.


students are from outside the UK\textsuperscript{13}, c.35\% of academic staff, and c.57\% of research staff are international. A significant proportion of Cambridge publications are co-authored with academics from overseas institutions (57\%), and the university is actively engaged in research projects and collaborations throughout the world. This international presence is, however, not always reflected in policies and strategies of the university.

At the time of writing, the collegiate university is working on, and still needs to work on, an effective access and widening participation strategy for international students. This is to make sure that the university is recruiting "the best" international students from a diverse range of countries and socio-economic backgrounds. This consideration is particularly pertinent in the post-Brexit context in which the University of Cambridge is believed to likely see a dramatic drop of EU postgraduate applications from the EU\textsuperscript{14},\textsuperscript{15}. As stated by UCAS\textsuperscript{16}, as in 2017 and 2018, 2019 saw EU applicant numbers remain below the level seen before the 2016 EU referendum (53,560). There are significant uncertainties for shaping the university’s outlook towards international students in the next years to come, due to Brexit and now the COVID-19 pandemic.

The GU has submitted several papers\textsuperscript{17} to address issues related to international students to the university, data from surveys are now available, and new strategies and policies have been drafted but not implemented yet. The university is actively looking at the level of satisfaction within schools, faculties and colleges among international students. They are affected by a number of issues. e.g. visa costs, accommodation, prejudices, behaviour on race, international identity, harassment and the gaps between how undergraduate and postgraduate students are perceived and treated. Many of these issues have also been flagged by the Universities UK reports in 2016\textsuperscript{18} and 2019\textsuperscript{19}. Among the many issues that need to be considered in achieving an inclusive global campus, the University of Cambridge is also looking at how the language policy affects international culture and the integration between UK/home and international students.

1.3. Widening participation in the UK

In the UK, the last 20 years have seen policymakers and many individual institutions of Higher Education (HE) pay far greater attention to attracting a more diverse student body, especially

\begin{itemize}
  \item International Student Data, available at: https://www.internationalstudents.cam.ac.uk/applying/global-community/international-student-data
  \item UCAS Applicants for UK higher education down: 7\% for EU students, available at: https://www.ucas.com/corporate/news-and-key-documents/news/applicants-uk-higher-education-down-5-uk-students-and-7-eu-students
  \item E.g. papers submitted to SWAP, STEC, GBEC, and PAC in particular, aimed to draft or improve policies concerning international students.
\end{itemize}
from those groups underrepresented in HE. This has resulted in massification in terms of access to and participation in HE studies, but issues of retention, achievement and progression for ‘Widening Participation’ (WP) for students remain problematic. A range of barriers faced by students from such backgrounds have been consistently reported in the literature. This is particularly the case for international students and postgraduate students. At this point in time, international and postgraduate WP strategies in the UK mostly concern recruitments and admissions. They should, however, not be limited to these and should also cover the overall experience, obtainment and success of WP for students during and after their courses.

In the context of the present report, WP for international students covers a range of issues international students encounter, including recruitment and access, admission procedures, immigration requirements, language training and tests, discrimination and harassment and, accommodation arrangements. These issues will be discussed below.

1.4. Aims and methods

The aim of this report is to improve the overall international student experience and to better support staff and Sabbatical officers when working with an increasingly diverse student body, especially in the light of contemporary political and economic changes in Europe. For the purpose of this report, recruitment terminology i.e. Home, EU and Overseas students is used for clarity, but the concept of international students will encapsulate both EU and Overseas students. The GU, however, acknowledges that none of these groups are homogenous. Furthermore, the key focus of the study is postgraduate students, although many of the recommendations made would also be valid for those who face many similar issues to the international postgraduate students.

Data from available surveys have been considered and available evidence have been presented at a Focus Group discussion. The surveys include the Big Cambridge survey, the iCUSU survey, the GU Mental Health survey, the CUCU survey on support for international staff, the Student Barometer Survey, and the Bounce-back survey. As discussed, and approved at a 2019 General Board’s Education Committee meeting and GU Council, the focus group was designed to provide an opportunity for staff and students to consider what it means for the Collegiate University of Cambridge to be an international University regarding the experience of our international students. In order to identify future strategic work on the identity of the University of Cambridge as a global university, which can deliver an international student experience, the focus group tackled two main questions:

1. To what extent does the University of Cambridge capitalise on the diversity created by its significant international student population to create a vibrant, cohesive and

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globally-oriented experience for all its students, whilst retaining the uniqueness of its history and traditions?

2. How can the University of Cambridge ensure that the experience of its international students is the very best it can be?

A set of four subsidiary questions was also asked as follows:

a. What would a global experience look like for both UK and international students in the Cambridge context?

b. In order to forge and sustain a global university, what would be the role of and opportunities for UK and international members of staff and students?

c. What type of provisions and policies are missing to achieve the vision of a global campus?

d. What are the risks of not having an international strategy that also include cultural and structural changes to make Cambridge a global campus?

The focus group was organised by the GU to discuss and to unpack the above questions on Thursday 23rd January 2020, at the University of Cambridge Student Services Centre. International students’ issues were discussed by members of staff and students representatives. The main scope was to collect ideas to inform what we need to do for international students now and in the years to come. During the meeting, detailed notes were taken to reflect the considerations of the participants and document them, with the aim of publishing an International Student Experience Report - viz. the present paper. The main issues highlighted by surveys and the focus group have been here gathered, along with comments and suggestions presented by the participants.

2. MAIN CONCERNS, DATA AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following section will unpack some of the main issues that have been observed by students, student representatives and members of staff of the university concerning international students. Each section will aim to briefly present the problem, the work currently done in that area, and suggestions for the future. Each section will also present a note on the possible impact of COVID19 pandemic on respective issues.

2.1. Satisfaction

There are a number of factors that can affect the overall satisfaction of international students, most of which are PGT or PGR at Cambridge, but data available is currently very limited. According to the Student Barometer Survey (SBS) 2018, the lowest scores achieved (30%-59%) were in the Living Satisfaction and Arrival categories (ibid, section 4.2, page 9) - this is especially true for PGT and PGR, but it seems to be the case for UG respondents as well. It is

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23 The 18 participants include representatives from the Head of Houses (e.g. Jane Clarke), Pro-Vice-Chancellors (e.g. Graham Virgo), Senior tutors committee (e.g Dr Mark Wormald), international Student Office (e.g. Anthony Dangerfield), Language Centre, student representatives, and Schools and Faculties. For instance, Graham Virgo (Senior Pro-Vice Chancellor for Education), the Wolfrom Head.

24 Use of survey data in this section has been approved by the Head of Education Services, Education Quality and Policy Office (EQPO), University of Cambridge, on 26 May 2020.

25 Available at: https://www.educationalpolicy.admin.cam.ac.uk/student-engagement/university-wide-surveys/student-barometer-survey
widely known that living costs and arrival experience disproportionately affect international students, who encounter issues such as cultural differences, access to suitable accommodation, quality of the external campus environment, challenges making friends from other countries, habituating to surroundings outside the institution, feeling safe and secure, "fitting in", language barriers and building a sense of belonging inside the student community.

The Big Cambridge Survey (BCS) 2018 reports on disparities of satisfaction amongst home and international students in terms of teaching and supervisions opportunities. According to its findings for postgraduate students from the UK, net satisfaction on the availability of teaching and supervision opportunities stands at 44%. This figure stands at 17% amongst international postgraduates, suggesting that teaching opportunities may not be distributed or allocated fairly amongst domestic and international students.

In terms of support from teaching staff and assessments, the data is concerning when we look at the gap between UK and international students. A past Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES 2016) points out that only 57% of postgraduate respondents were satisfied by the assessments of their Master’s courses, which is 6.9% below the Russell Group mean. The PTES was then replaced by the Student Barometer and Bounce-back survey in the following years; however, data concerning postgraduate assessments in the Student Barometer Survey (SBS 2018) summary report is usually limited in the top-level reports.26

In the Bounce-back Survey (2018), which was administered to students on 1-year long courses, including MASs and 1-year long MPhils currently classified as PGR on CamSIS, issues concerning assessments were flagged again. Due to the tailored nature of the survey, results cannot be compared to the Russell Group/Sector. In the Easter 2019 summary report of this survey, it is shown that the widest gaps between Home-UK and international students concern fair and transparent marking of their work (Home-UK = 67% vs international=50%), clarity in marking and assessment criteria (Home-UK = 64% vs international= 47%) and usefulness of feedback on their coursework (Home-UK = 62% vs international= 46%). In terms of BAME students (ibid, section 5.3, page 7), about half of the surveyed black postgraduate students saw the workload as excessive; only 48% thought the workload was not excessive.27 About 45% thought that the marking of the coursework was prompt, fair and transparent, as opposed to 60% of white students who felt the same. According to the BCS 2018, while 72% of home students felt fully supported by their college teaching staff, only 62% EU students and 48% students from outside the EU held this view.

In summary, the main areas of low satisfaction for international students include living costs, arrival experience, assessments, supervision, teaching opportunities and support by teaching staff.

26 The 2016 survey may be considered “old” to refer to; however, some of the data are still relevant to observe trends and developments. Results for PGTs are available from both the Student Barometer and the Bounce-back survey for years 2018 and 2019; however, the summary reports are usually delivered to senior leaders of the University, hence certain information cannot be found in the top-level reports.

27 This could have also left out some “neither agree nor disagree” responses on the point Likert scale.
Recommendations:

- There is a need for comprehensive research and data on levels of satisfaction specifically amongst international postgraduate (and also undergraduate students). Broader surveys that target both Home and international postgraduate and undergraduate students through one instrument risk erasing the visibility of international students and their concerns.
- The data gathered centrally by the Student Barometre, Education Quality and Policy Office (EQPO) or Cambridge Centre for Teaching and Learning (CCTL), should take into account equality profiles, particularly ethnicity, gender and disabilities amongst international students. For perspective, the findings of these research must be comparable to the Russel group data and research from the broader HE sector.

2.2. Immigration, visa and NHS surcharge

Visa applications to secure permission to study in the UK tends to be a daunting and expensive undertaking for international students outside the EU. The GU Mental Health Report (2019)\(^\text{28}\) shows that 30% of international students reported immigration and visa problems affected their mental health. Most non-EU or non-EEA nationals applying for studying in the UK must pay an 'Immigration Health Surcharge' (IHS) to the Home Office, in addition to the Visa application fee. The IHS charge, also known as NHS surcharge, has doubled since it was introduced in 2015. The current rate, in place since January 2019, is £400 per year (£300 for certain visa categories)\(^\text{29}\). In October 2020, the IHS is set to increase again to £624 per year for those wanting to acquire a Tier 2 visa, with a discounted increase to £470 per year for Tier 4 students\(^\text{30}\).

The visa fees, coupled with the continuously rising NHS surcharge, amounts to more than £800 for one year of study. For students on longer postgraduate courses (e.g. three or four years) or undergraduate students, the NHS surcharge of £470 a year, will need to be paid upfront for the duration of the course (e.g. £1,880 to cover a four-year PhD course). This amount is in itself a greater sum than the monthly cost of living expenditure (£1,095) prescribed by the government. This means that for students on scholarship stipends, the upfront payment of visa fees and NHS surcharge can be more than one month’s stipend. In effect, lack of support from the University to cover visa applications and NHS surcharges can easily leave students out of pocket for a month’s maintenance or more. Moreover, for students with families, the expenses for applying for a UK visa are multiple times higher, since these costs are applicable for each member of the household. The inability to afford these costs results in the forced separation of families.

The UK has one of the most restrictive post-study visa provisions for international students. Master’s students are allowed less than a six-month period after graduation to find employment in the UK, while PhD students are eligible for a one-year Doctorate Extension.

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\(^{28}\) Available at: https://www.gradunion.cam.ac.uk/files/postgraduate-mhreport

\(^{29}\) The Immigration Health Surcharge, House of Commons, available at: https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7274/

Scheme after completing their PhD. The government also imposes criteria on the type of job and salary threshold for eligibility for a Tier 2 (employment visa) sponsorship. Moreover, public/charity sector/employers often seem either unwilling or ineligible to sponsor a Tier 2 visa for an international employee. What this means is that international students, who wish to work in the UK, have an unrealistic time frame to find a job and limited avenues for employment. They are often confined to the private/corporate sector and academia.

The UK government has introduced changes to post-study visa provisions from 2021. Tier 4 students will be allowed a two-year visa extension after completing their course to seek employment in the UK. There will no longer be salary thresholds or restrictions on the type of employment in the two-year post study visas. While this new government policy is a much-needed reform, post study employment has become more chequered due to the COVID19 pandemic. For students graduating before 2021, the six-month post study period to find employment has become prohibitive in light of the economic/employment crisis brought by the pandemic. Even the two-year post-study visa extension has to be reviewed in light of how circumstances related to employment and travel are impacted by the COVID19 pandemic.

Recommendations:

● The funding bodies across the university have inconsistent policies over covering the costs of visa fees and NHS surcharge. The University and Senior Tutors should consider a mandatory policy for all funding bodies providing scholarships to international students to cover Visa and NHS surcharge fees.
● Colleges and Senior Tutors must take into account the additional burden of visa costs for international students and lower their fees charged to them.
● There should be concerted efforts from the university bodies to lobby the government to provide longer post study visas for students graduating in 2020 amidst the COVID19 pandemic.
● There should be continuous discussion on whether the two-year post study visa meets the needs of international students seeking employment in the UK. These conversations must involve the University’s Career Service.

2.3. Language provisions and Institutional Language Policy (ILP)

The University of Cambridge is a member of the League of European Research Universities (LERU). Not only is Cambridge one of the few Universities in the League without a formal language policy, but it does not feature at all within the new report (LERU, Bernd Kortmann, Briefing Paper No. 4 - November 2019). 13 out of 18 responding LERU universities implement some form of official institutionalised language policy (ILP), most of them beginning from 2010.

Institutionalised Language Policy (ILP) documents specify the linguistic competence that students, lecturers and other staff need to attain in order to study or work at a given university – including a list of the specific language tests that are necessary and recognised by that institution. These documents also outline possible ways in which existing language deficits in prospective candidates might be addressed. Such strategies for language development address
not only the acquisition and improvement of the national (or: host) language(s) but also skills in additional languages\textsuperscript{31}.

A survey by the European University Association (EUA) demonstrates that practically all European universities follow a strategy of internationalisation which primarily aims at promoting mobility across target groups\textsuperscript{32}. Successful internationalisation and mobility depend upon coherent official language policies. Such policies should also define to what extent measures to internationalise universities need to be applied within the universities’ administration.

In the UK Universities, there have been repeated calls for a consolidated effort to promote foreign language learning. The London School of Economics, for example, highlights the importance of education, in general, and the promotion of foreign language learning for local and international students, in particular. This is seen as a means for professional development. This movement in favour of foreign language learning is also supported by the British Council\textsuperscript{33};

International students who have met the University’s ‘Language Condition’ of entry to graduate programmes may (and often do) still need additional support in developing their English skills for academic writing and presentation. Proof of English language proficiency is not sufficient to ensure that students can follow English-medium academic conventions and structure arguments appropriately as various aspects of constructing arguments are shaped by cultural factors. Training can help level the playing field between Home students who largely speak English as a first language and international students.\textsuperscript{34}

Those students who are set the In-Sessional as a condition of entry by the Graduate Admissions Office (GAO), having marginally failed to meet the language condition for entry, are required to confirm their ability to pay for it (i.e. £385 per student in 2017/18) when meeting the financial conditions of entry. For all other students who might be referred to the Language Centre or elect to seek this additional (sometimes crucial) support, the fees (£280/student in 2017) impose an additional financial burden. In 2019 the cost of language training increased as follows: \textsuperscript{35}

A. Full Conditional: £790;
B. Half Conditional: £420; and
C. Elective (i.e. not conditional): £300.

International students who are non-native English speakers are expected to cover the expenses for (a) a very expensive pre-sessional English Course; and (b) an expensive in-sessional

\textsuperscript{31} For a review of language policies, see Gutierrez Eugenio, Ester and Nick Saville (2017). Policy review: The role of assessment in European language policy: a historical overview. Languages, Society & Policy, available at: https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.9801

\textsuperscript{32} Colucci E. et al. 2014. Connecting mobility policies and practice: Observations and recommendations on national and institutional developments in Europe.


\textsuperscript{34} see Cambridge Graduate Admissions, Competence in English, available at: https://www.graduate.study.cam.ac.uk/international/competence-english

\textsuperscript{35} For more info, see the Cambridge Academic Development and Training for International Students (ADTIS), available at: https://www.langcen.cam.ac.uk/adtis/adtis-index.html
academic English course. Other Universities in the UK (e.g. University of Manchester; SOAS; etc.) cover the cost of in-sessional support courses;

In a national survey by British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP), over 90% of HE institutions that responded provided In-Sessional support free of cost to international students who required it (also see Brewer S. et al., 2019. Papers on In-sessional English for Academic Purposes, LSE).

The GU and CUSU believe the promotion of foreign language learning for local and international students is crucial as a means for professional and personal development. From a HE perspective, the development of ILP goes hand in hand with the process of making universities more international.

**Recommendations:**

- The University of Cambridge General Board and its Education Committee should formalise an Institutionalised Language Policy. This should include provisions and suggestions for Home students and for international students equally, in the spirit of building a global, international campus.
- In-sessional English courses and ‘student support’ provision should be included in student fees (without further increasing fees for international students).
- Heads of Schools and Heads of Houses, as well as the Cambridge Admission Office, should set up a mechanism to cover the expenses of in-sessional courses for students who may need this. In practical terms, this would potentially require a topslice of international fee income allocated to the Language Centre before distribution to Schools, thus reducing the allocations to Schools (without further increasing fees for international students). The Language Centre would estimate, based on calculations in other universities, that £45-£50 sliced off all international student fees would be sufficient, but this could be reviewed according to take-up/demand and actual costs incurred by the Language Centre to staff the delivery.

**2.4. Language tests**

If English is not the first language of an applicant or prospective student, the University of Cambridge will require the individual to submit evidence that the prospective student meets the University’s English language requirement before being admitted to the course of study. The University usually accepts IELTS, TOEFL, CAE (C1 Advanced) and CPE (C2 Proficiency) tests. These tests are remarkably expensive, and put unnecessary pressure on WP international students. Moreover, some prospective students may have to take these tests multiple times, until they reach the requisite score to be admitted to the course of study. The University has a list of countries that have special regulations concerning language assessments, known as List A and List B. These lists set up exceptions, including not taking a test, taking an external language test, or having an assessment with the University of Cambridge Language Centre.

Recommendations:

- Allow students who have just missed obtaining the university’s minimum score in the English Language tests to take a pre-sessional English course at the University and begin their course of study. To widen access the University must provide the pre-sessional and in-sessional course free of charge to such students.

- To expand the List A and List B of Countries to include more countries which second language or official education language is English. All List B countries should be eligible for assessment by the Language Centre where necessary, or should be included under List A, and should not be asked for a language test.

- Applicants who are not nationals of countries listed under List A and List B, but who have studied there and completed a qualification equivalent to a UK Bachelor’s should also be exempt from being set a language condition. This should not be limited to “within two years of the start date of their proposed course of study”. This limitation should be removed entirely, or at least expanded to “within 10 years”.

- Expand the list of accepted tests, to include more easily accessible testing platforms, e.g. the Duolingo English Test can be taken online anytime, anywhere, it can be completed in one hour and results are available in two days. This is accepted by over 2000 institutions, including Yale University, Duke University, and Columbia University of New York.

2.5. Discrimination and harassment

Discrimination and harassment (include sexual harassment) tend to be intersectional in nature as they take place on the basis of several protected characteristics such as gender identity, ethnicity, race and faith. The BCS 2018 shows that more than one third of Cambridge University students (36%) from outside the EU and 30% from the EU report being affected by prejudiced attitudes based on race or ethnicity.

In addition to more commonly understood forms of discrimination and harassment perpetrated by individuals against each other, discrimination is also evident in course curricula across departments. Reading lists have historically excluded non-European voices. Although the initiative taken by several departments, e.g. CCTL, the faculty of English and Department of Sociology, to diversify curricula is a step in the right direction, diversification needs to move beyond tokenism. Diversity initiates thus far have failed to interrogate Eurocentrism, and international voices have not been successfully brought into mainstream research, teaching and learning frameworks to challenge the British/Western orthodoxies in the creation and dissemination of knowledge.

Political developments such as Brexit and the recent COVID19 pandemic have exacerbated targeted racism and violence against minorities such as African-Caribbean, Black, Asian and European communities. A January 2016 survey on the impact of Brexit showed that 71% of people from ethnic minorities faced discrimination, an increase from 58% reported in previous
Following the COVID-19 pandemic, on May 2020 the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that “the pandemic continues to unleash a tsunami of hate and xenophobia, scapegoating and scare-mongering” and urged institutions to “act now to strengthen the response against the virus of hate.” It is likely that with protective measures like social distancing changing the nature of human interaction, discrimination and harassment may emerge in newer forms, including being exacerbated on online platforms.

Recommendations:

- Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) of the strategies and policies of the University should be undertaken as frequently as possible, and the resulting EIAs reports should be made public. Particular attention should be given to the recovery strategy in COVID-19 circumstances. Senior consultants of the Equality and Diversity section of the University should be more involved in strategic meetings of the University, and papers should be circulated to them for EIAs.
- Members of OSCCA and SUAS should be involved in drafting targeted strategies and trainings to tackle issues of discrimination towards BAME and international students recognising that these issues are systematic and structural. Conversations on discrimination and harassment resolutions should involve Senior Tutors, students representatives from Colleges and Schools and Faculties to address issues that arise both at the College and University levels.

2.6. Recruitment and widening participation (WP) strategies

There are students from 146 different countries at the University of Cambridge. The University currently has a greater number of international students than home students. According to the International student data, out of a total of 22,693 students, 13,095 (57.7%) are international students. The greatest proportion of international students (9.8%) are from China. Four of the ten countries (Germany, Italy, France and Ireland) with the greatest number of students at the university are from the EU (12.6%). At a time when there is uncertainty about how global politics, including Brexit, will affect applicants from the EU (as the applications from the EU has fallen by 10% in 2019/2020), the university needs a carefully considered student recruitment strategy. For instance, one of the questions that the university may consider is how to maintain the student diversity if European student numbers continue to fall.

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37 Source: Opinium. 1,006 people from ethnic minorities in the UK interviewed 22 February - 14 March 2019. Also see Opinium 2019. Racism rising since Brexit vote, available at: https://www.opinium.co.uk/racism-rising-since-brexit-vote/
39 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA). The EIA is the University’s mechanism for undertaking equality impact analysis of policies or functions relevant to the Public Equality Duties (Equality Act 2010). The Process involves the analysis of information and feedback from protected groups and others - info available at: https://www.equality.admin.cam.ac.uk/equality-diversity-cambridge/equality-impact-assessment-eia
40 Office of Student Conduct, Complaints and Appeals (OSCCA), available at: https://www.academic.admin.cam.ac.uk/education/student-operations/office-student-conduct-complaints-and-appeals-oscca
41 Students’ Unions’ Advice Service, info available at: www.studentadvice.cam.ac.uk
42 International Student Data, available at: https://www.internationalstudents.cam.ac.uk/applying/global-community/international-student-data
Maintaining diversity by admitting students from varied nationalities is only the first step. It is seen that students from cultures and backgrounds that are very different from British culture gravitate towards socialising with their own nationalities. While students’ choices to choose their friends and activities of engagement must be respected, social and academic spaces need to be critically assessed to mitigate barriers they impose for such students to participate in them.

Once students are admitted, University departments, student unions and respective colleges hold a large number of induction events at the beginning of the year that are open to international students. This type of welcoming support seems to significantly shrink after the initial two or three weeks of courses at Cambridge; however, many international students have flagged the need for continued support and information as they progress through the year. For example, students who cannot travel home may feel particularly lonely and homesick during holiday time; students may require support to understand the expectations of the Cambridge system when they are carrying out their course assignments; students who fall onto financial hardship may require information about accessing funds or suitable employment. Data from the Student Union’s Advice Services between July 2016 – February 2020 indicate the types of problems international students face while studying at the University. They show the services dealt with a total of 364 international student cases of which 316 were postgraduate cases and 48 were undergraduate cases. Of the postgraduate cases presented: 19% were health and wellbeing related with mental health the most common issue, 13% were examination-related (e.g. failure, underperformance, allowance, review) and 6% were finance-related (e.g. funding, hardship).

Although it may be argued that Colleges are set up to provide individualised support to their students, most graduate students have lesser contact with their colleges in comparison to undergraduates. Many live outside college premises, often in private accommodations, and spend the greatest amount of time in their respective departments, libraries and laboratories. Furthermore, the university needs to consider seriously the role played by support staff in colleges and departments such as, porters, cleaners, receptionists and buildings managers who play a significant role in the experiences of incoming students.
Spotlight on: Outfacing international strategies for the University of Cambridge

The University of Cambridge has been discussing strategies for recruitment and impact outside of the University. Drafts of strategies are usually presented as outfacing, exterior plans, but have strong recruitment components, and therefore an educational scope.

The main problem of these strategies often is that they seem to claim to have an external facing approach, but include issues of education as well as access, which are historically treated as internal issues. These are two separate but interconnected aspects: one is external facing to recruit, the other is about the educational experience here in Cambridge, which has an inward focus for all students with wide implications. Both are important, but they have different dimensions which are often not clearly articulated in international strategies. The goals of these strategies are often clumsy and need unpacking to properly address these aspects.

It is important to remember that the international student dimension does not stop at recruitment. When drafting international strategies, the University needs to look at the whole student life-cycle and the implications of a growing international student body here in Cambridge. Dimensions include provision of cultural, academic and linguistic support; support for integration, and developing a global Cambridge culture which does not simply expect international students to conform to Anglocentric cultural and academic norms but which challenges those norms and negotiates for new ones to be articulated for both home and international students, through the development of respectful and equitable cross-cultural dialogue and encounters.

Competing globally to recruit will require the University not only to develop more international partnerships, but to address the international student experience and to recognise the support required for international students in Cambridge – culturally, academically, linguistically and in terms of welfare and mental health support. The recruitment side of the strategy should also acknowledge existing efforts of international postgraduate widening participation, and strengthen the international WD strategy and operations not just to reach “the best students”, but the “best students from all backgrounds”.

The COVID19 pandemic has introduced tremendous uncertainty about how the university will function in the near future. If the University is not able to open physically for Michaelmas term 2020, there will be new challenges to imagining how international students who are in different countries will be inducted into the Cambridge environment and culture, coupled with the risk of exacerbating cases of isolation.

Recommendations:

- The University must first explore whether it is currently providing an international student experience which is sufficiently competitive with other leading global
providers of Higher Education, as part of this global recruitment goal. This dimension does not appear to be recognised in the external facing strategy of the University.

- Admission and recruitment strategies need to carefully consider WP strategies, for international and postgraduate students, and how to maintain diversity. If particular regions of the world are targeted for recruitment of students, there must be sound logic behind this, including clear strategies to ensure the inclusion and participation of these students in University life.

- While initial support through induction programmes are important, there should be support mechanisms in place for international students throughout the year. The challenges that students face through the year in areas such as but not limited to academic work, accommodation and funding must be anticipated beforehand strategies to address them must be put in place.

- The departments must be encouraged to create social spaces such as reading groups and recreational activities that will encourage participation of students from different countries and cultures. This is particularly important for graduate students in the social sciences arts and humanities who tend to work alone.

- College tutors must be encouraged to be more proactive in reaching out to their students to promote a healthy work-life balance.

- There must be recognition that there are systems and traditions unique to Cambridge such as matriculation and formal halls. Such ‘Cambridgeisms’ must be made more accessible by giving students adequate prior information so they know what to expect and feel more comfortable coming to these events.

2.7. Accommodation

The quality and affordability of accommodation impacts the overall wellbeing of international students. Unlike home students, international students do not have the advantage of understanding the UK housing market or have the ability to arrange viewings of the private accommodation before signing a lease. In this context the availability of college and university accommodation increases the access of international students to housing. However, there is great disparity in accommodation rents across colleges leading to disparate effects on student finances. For example, the NUS recommends that no more than half of income of students should be spent on rent. The BCS 2018 shows that in Cambridge, single room rent ranges from £400 to £740 per month across colleges – and most postgraduate funding schemes offer a maintenance stipend of which more than 50% usually goes towards rent. Moreover, colleges also have varying policies about allowing students to arrive early and stay over vacation periods. Students who are required to vacate college accommodation during vacation periods face challenges of accessing adequate storage space. Overall, according to the BCS 2018, students from the EU are less likely to agree that their university rent is fair, with only 28% saying so, compared to 46% of home students. Similarly, the SBS 2018, shows that the satisfaction of postgraduate students regarding the cost of accommodation is low - 49% satisfaction amongst surveyed respondents.

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43 See GU’s report on affordable housing, available at: https://www.gradunion.cam.ac.uk/files/mcr-resources/reporthiddenchargesrent
44 The data here has not been disaggregated; however, c.65% of postgraduate students at the time of the survey were international.
The colleges also provide differing levels of support to postgraduate students who go on fieldwork. Undertaking research in the field is an inherently precarious task that may require the student to leave the field abruptly and return to the University or prolong the duration of the research. The challenges of securing college/university/private housing to accommodate the unpredictable nature of field research adds significant stress on students.

Many Cambridge colleges increase their accommodation rent each year leading to continuous disagreements between student groups and college administration. Even tentative suggestions, such as the case of college staff suggesting to increase rent amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, can cause distress among the international student community. While colleges have incurred losses on their rent income, the increase in rent during a period of increased unemployment and financial hardship/uncertainty for students puts immense strain on students. As Educating Beyond Borders\(^45\) have pointed out, UK universities claim to be mindful of the plight of students who have nowhere else to go. But the main issue for students contacting charities is as urgent as dwindling food, worries how to get food and worries about accommodation contracts ending soon. This crisis is affecting international students disproportionately, with dozens of thousands of cases of stranded or at risk\(^46\).

**Recommendations:**

- There must be a review of the services provided by University of Cambridge Accommodation Service\(^47\), especially in terms of the quality of the support and contribution of this service in improving the experience of international students looking for private accommodation.

- In order to provide consistent accommodation provision across the collegiate university, the Senior Tutors Committee should promote a system of good practice which will involve the documentation and sharing of student-friendly practices already in place across colleges. Some of these models that may be worth adopting across colleges is the practice of some colleges to provide guaranteed accommodation to students through the duration of their fieldwork.

- The University Accommodation Services and Colleges must provide better guidance to students who are renting from private landlords about good practices in a tenancy contract.

- The colleges and university must ensure that accommodation rent does not increase in the next academic year. A review of costs of renting University and college accommodation should be undertaken, given the fact that rent in Cambridge has reached hotel rates\(^48\).

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\(^46\) The Guardian 2020. This article is more than 2 months old Thousands of students stranded at university amid UK lockdown, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/mar/24/thousands-of-students-stranded-at-university-because-of-uk-lockdown

\(^47\) See https://www.accommodation.cam.ac.uk

\(^48\) Graduate Union calls for action on postgraduate student ‘housing crisis’. Link: https://www.varsity.co.uk/news/17159
2.8. Post-Brexit

Under the withdrawal agreement, there will be a transition period until the end of 2020 while the UK and EU negotiate arrangements for their future relationship. During this period, EEA and Swiss nationals continue to have the right of free movement to study and work in the UK and will be eligible to apply for the EU Settlement Scheme in order to protect their longer-term rights to live in the UK. This will be applicable to students admitted in Easter term 2020 and Michaelmas term 2021.

The Government intends to end freedom of movement for EEA and Swiss nationals and introduce a global immigration system from January 2021. The Home Office does not expect there to be a radical overhaul of the existing student visa routes to accommodate EEA and Swiss nationals but further detail is yet to be announced. New visa requirements would affect students starting their studies in 2021, although those admitted in Lent term next year may wish to consider moving to the UK prior 1 January in order to take advantage of the EU Settlement Scheme.

Recommendations:

- We hope to see the International Student Office working closely with EU students, monitoring developments closely, and engaging with the Home Office and sector representative bodies as appropriate.
- We also hope to see frequent and consistent communication sent to current and new students in summer 2020, followed by periodic communications until January 2021.

2.9. Application fee waivers and higher tuition fees

Many universities in the UK, e.g., Cardiff, Exeter, and York, do not require prospective students to pay an application fee, whilst other universities charge significantly lower rates than Cambridge, which charges £65 application fee for postgraduate courses. It is the policy of the Graduate Admissions Office not to waive the application fee, unless applicants fall into one of the categories listed by the University of Cambridge49.

The Graduate Union agrees50 that the £65 application fee is a significant barrier to fair access to study at Cambridge, and has been a vocal critic of the fee within the University. Over the last two years, the GU has helped to limit proposed rises in the application fee51 and has also worked with the Graduate Admissions Office to expand the system of fee waivers for students from some countries and from low income households.

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49 Cambridge Application Fee Waivers, available at: https://www.graduate.study.cam.ac.uk/application-process/how-do-i-apply/application-fee
50 Postgraduate application fee criticised as a ‘significant barrier’ to improving access, available at https://www.varsity.co.uk/news/18832
The GU has a policy to oppose any rises above £50, which was passed by the Graduate Union Council on the 9 July 2018, passing a motion opposing the proposed increase of the postgraduate application fee.

Besides significant access barriers, the National Union of Students (NUS)\textsuperscript{52} agrees that international students are often, and should not be, treated as "cash cows" in the UK. Students from outside the EU pay up to four times the fees charged to UK students. Some international undergraduates pay up to £35,000 a year - more than three times the amount paid by home students\textsuperscript{53}. At the University of Cambridge, international students currently pay approximately three times higher tuition fees for their course. In addition to this amount, unlike home students on their first degree, some international students pay more than £9,000 College fees per year. The University Composition Fees for international postgraduate students are also not fixed and disproportionately higher, usually two or three times higher than Home fees, coupled with extra "Settling In" fees of £350 for international students only.

**Recommendations:**

- Fees should be fixed to ensure international students are treated fairly in the UK.
- The University needs to recognize that prospective postgraduates apply to multiple universities, while prospective undergraduates applying through UCAS only pay £24 for five applications.
- The University of Cambridge, in line with its Widening Access and Participation Strategy, should expand the system of fee waivers, and significantly reduce the application fees - ideally finding a way to scrape them entirely.

### 3. CLOSING REMARKS

The present paper aimed to discuss issues for international students raised by student representatives and members of staff, with a special emphasis on access and widening participation (WP), as well as on strategies to forge a global campus. It emphasises that WP is not limited to diversity of recruitment of international students, but includes a number of factors that affect their experience, satisfaction, success and participation in University life. These factors include recruitment and access, admission procedures, immigration requirements, language training and tests, discrimination and harassment, and accommodation arrangements. Data gathered from surveys, student reports to the Students’ Unions, and responses from members of staff of the university and colleges and student representatives in a focus group discussion have informed the issues identified under each item discussed in the paper. In tandem with the challenges raised for WP, the GU has provided recommendations of strategies that can be undertaken to address them.

The GU hopes to see more efforts towards forging an inclusive global university, and encourages the senior leadership of the University to prioritise designing and revising policies

\textsuperscript{52} NUS: International students are treated like ‘cash cows’, available at: https://www.artslondonnews.com/?p=46479
\textsuperscript{53} BBC 2013, International students pay premium at UK universities, available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-23614142
and services to make this vision a reality. This is particularly important in this time of uncertainty for international students, especially in a post Brexit and COVID19 world.

APPENDIX: RESOURCES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN CAMBRIDGE

- Cambridge City Council, Information for students: https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/information-for-students
- International Student Guide Pre-arrival and orientation information: https://www.internationalstudents.cam.ac.uk/files/international_student_guide.pdf
- University Counselling Service: www.counselling.cam.ac.uk
- International Student Office: https://www.iso.admin.cam.ac.uk/contact
- The Language Centre: https://www.langcen.cam.ac.uk
- Students’ Unions’ Advice Service: https://www.studentadvice.cam.ac.uk
- Harassment & Sexual Misconduct: https://www.studentcomplaints.admin.cam.ac.uk/harassment-sexual-misconduct
CUSU/GU Lent 2020 Returning Officer’s Report

Elections Committee:
- Alex Roberts (CUSU Returning Officer/GU Deputy Returning Officer)
- Aisha Sobey (GU Returning Officer/CUSU Deputy Returning Officer)
- Edward Parker Humphreys (Communications Officer)
- Emily Barker-Gibbs
- Joe Foye
- Christy McMorrow (non-voting staff member, EC secretary).

Elections Committee Constitution & Operation:
Prior to the election period, due to resignations from the committee after the Michaelmas elections, it was decided that two new members should be appointed, along with the addition of Edward Parker Humphreys, the CUSU President, who had recused himself in the Michaelmas period. This was enacted, and the EC welcomed Emily Barker-Gibbs and Joe Foye to the EC. A significant change from previous years was that complaints and queries to the Elections Committee would not be immediately received by all members of the committee, but would instead be received by Christy McMorrow, as the CUSU staff member responsible for supporting the committee, who would then compile a daily agenda. This limited EC discussions, except in emergency circumstances, to once a day. This was successful in reducing the intensity of EC’s workload from previous years, although the committee nonetheless committed significant time to the work. This change was implemented as a result of recommendations of the previous year’s committee.

The EC made the decision to meet at the same point every day during campaigning to discuss complaints and make decisions. It was decided several weeks in advance that meetings would be at 1pm, allowing committee members to plan appropriately.

This was the final major election run under the purview of the CUSU Elections Committee, and future elections will be governed by the Cambridge SU Democracy Committee, which will also be responsible for overseeing other aspects of the good governance of the Students’ Union. This new committee will from this point onwards be made up of the Returning Officer, the Chair of Union Council, the Chair of the Executive Committee (which will be one of the Union Presidents), and two other students appointed by the Union Council.

Candidate Recruitment:
In total there were 19 candidates in these elections, which represented an increase from the 17 candidates running for CUSU/GU sabbatical roles and the University Councillor role last year. However, there was one more sabbatical role available than in the 2019 Lent elections. While all roles were contested in 2019, this was not the case this year, with only one candidate running for the roles of Access, Education and Participation (UG) Officer, Access, Education and Participation (PG) Officer, BME Officer, Disabled Students’ Officer, and Welfare & Community Officer. This is something we will seek to prevent in future years.

However, for two of the roles (President (UG) and Women’s Officer) there was a much higher number of candidates than in any of the last 5 years, with 5 candidates running for each position. The highly-competitive nature of the Women’s Officer election is particularly noteworthy, as the 2019 election was the first time since 2016 that as many as 2 candidates had contested for the role.
This result is evidence of the importance of consistent and encouraging promotion of the positives of running in elections, as well as promoting the role itself. The Elections Committee notes the admirable level of work put in by CUSU Women’s Officer Kate Litman in encouraging candidates to run for the role. Moving forward is clear that efforts of this kind should be continued to ensure that future elections are contested where possible.

**Voter Turnout:**

Voter turnout for the CUSU elections this year was 20.9%, slightly down on last year’s 22.2%. This was largely due to the significant increase in the electorate due to the inclusion of non-matriculated part-time students in the membership for Cambridge SU. These voters turned out in very low numbers, and will be a target group for the future.

A new record for the number of votes cast in a central SU election was achieved for the second year in a row, with the 2020 total of 5,144 narrowly surpassing the 2019 total of 5,120. Postgraduate turnout (926 votes), while higher than in last year’s CUSU election, was lower than in the previous year’s GU election (1,125 votes). This disparity is a key challenge for the new SU, and work to amend this will be prioritised, to ensure faith in the new Union is high amongst Postgraduate members.

**Election Rules:**

Complaints within this election were relatively low in comparison to previous years, however some issues did emerge in the elections that were of particular concern. In particular, EC had to escalate to the Trustee Board an issue involving a sabbatical officer being understood to have helped campaign against a candidate in the elections. This issue reiterates the need for Cambridge SU sabbatical officers to clearly understand the prohibition on campaigning for candidates other than themselves in elections to Union positions. EC recommends that this is made as explicit as possible to the incoming team.

The only major amendment to the CUSU election rules was to permit candidates to post in “closed” social media groups and chats. This was a long-standing CUSU rule, but one that EC believed to be difficult to enforce, and encouraged candidates to spend time raising complaints against infringements on this rule, rather than focusing on winning over voters. This alteration significantly reduced the number of complaints raised by candidates during the elections and overall led to a less “litigious” elections period.

Beyond this, there was little change to the rules of the election or their enforcement. Only one candidate received a punishment beyond a warning; a one-day campaign ban that was issued to Jess O’Brien for sharing resources with another campaign.

**Campaigining:**

CUSU and the GU are incredibly thankful to the efforts put into the election by candidates and acknowledge that the high voter turnouts in recent years are largely due to their energies. With candidates again opting to avoid lecture sites due to ongoing UCU industrial action, as had been the case in 2018, candidates had to rely on their initiative in designing campaign strategies that found alternate ways of reaching students.

Less time was spent on preparing candidates for the requirements of running for election than in 2019, with only one event being run for those considering running for election. An increase in these events should be considered in order to maximise candidate confidence and voter outreach.
Results:

The winners of the elections were as follows:
President (UG): Ben Margolis
President (PG): Aastha Dahal
Access, Education & Participation Officer (UG): Esme Cavendish
Access, Education & Participation Officer (PG): Siyang Wei
BME Officer: Howard Chae
Disabled Students’ Officer: Kerensa Gaunt
Welfare & Community Officer: Alice Gilderdale
University Councillor: Freddie Poser
INTRODUCTION

This report gives a commentary to the 2020-21 Cambridge SU budget. Despite best efforts to produce a break even budget for 2020-21 the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic have made this impossible. Our income generation activities for 2020-21 have not only been affected by having to cancel the Fresher’s Fair event, which would normally deliver in excess of £120,000 of income, but we are also seeing a significant drop in both digital and print advertising. Initial budgets suggested that Cambridge SU would deliver a deficit in excess of £175,000 for 2020-21 however we have made changes to plans and restructured staffing to reduce this deficit.

Despite this projected deficit, Cambridge SU will still be in a strong financial position at the end of 2020-21. Cambridge SU reserves currently stand at approximately £400,000. The projected deficit will reduce reserve levels to around £280,000 by the end of 2020-21. This in line with previous plans to reduce reserve levels to between 3-4 months’ running costs, in line with advice received from the University and existing Charity Commission guidance on reserves.
The trustees have approved the following budget for 2020-21.

### Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University and College Funds</th>
<th>Expenditure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SUAS College Levy</td>
<td>£ 137,360.00 Representations and Campaigns  £ 33,425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Administered Funds</td>
<td>£ 483,397.00 Grant Activity  £ 22,482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access and WP Grants</td>
<td>£ 22,000.00 Income Generation  £ 79,820</td>
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<tr>
<td>Childcare Office Grant</td>
<td>£ 2,475.00</td>
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<td>Sexual Health Scheme Grant</td>
<td>£ 10,753.00</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>£655,985</strong></td>
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</table>

### Expenditure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct Expenses</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Direct Expenses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Overheads

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fundraising</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Print Promotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Promotions (incl. contracts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Contracts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshers Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refresher Fair</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reception 'shop'</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTUM (NUS Extra cards)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overheads</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staffing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licences &amp; Subscriptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print &amp; Stationary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audit &amp; Legal Fees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel &amp; Subsistence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cleaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repairs &amp; Maintenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sundries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank Charges</td>
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<tr>
<td>Depreciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad Debt Write Off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Overheads</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Total Income

- **£799,385**

### Surplus/(Deficit)

- **£119,241**

## INCOME

Budgeted fundraising income for Cambridge SU for 2020-21 before the Covid-19 pandemic was £295,300. This has now been reduced to £139,600 for the following reasons:

- The cancellation of Freshers’ Fair - £103,600
- Reduction in Print Advertising - £14,000
- Reduction in Digital Advertising - £15,500
- Reduction in Shop Sales - £22,600

We have had to cancel the Freshers’ Fair as a physical event for 2020-21. Due to the nature of the event it would be impossible to maintain social distancing regulations even if...
they were to be reduced to 1 metre. The safety of students, staff and our customers attending the fair is our priority. We have plans in place to hold a digital Freshers’ Fair event so that societies can engage with students and sign up new members, however, after testing the market it seems unlikely that this event will be attractive to many commercial customers and we are predicting to break even at best. We will introduce a smaller scale Refresher’s Fair event in January which we predict will bring in a small amount of income to offset the loss of Freshers’ Fair.

We are predicting a reduction in Print Advertising revenue due to the following reasons;

- We would normally achieve circa £10,000 from GTI for advertising in the careers guide that we distribute at Freshers’ Fair. Given that the fair will no longer be going ahead it will be almost impossible for us to distribute the required number of copies and as such we are not expecting to receive this income.
- We would normally expect to make around £2,500 from advertising in our printed Fresher’s Guide which again would be distributed at Freshers’ Fair, which will not be possible.
- We had also planned a special Fresher’s Print Edition of the TCS magazine which would have generated £1,500 in income. Again this will not be possible.

We are expecting a reduction in our Digital Advertising revenue due to the following reasons;

- One of our main sources of digital advertising is through digital screens in areas where larger groups of students congregate (J/MCR bars, cafés and the SU building). Due to the cancellation of large lectures and the publicity in the press that Cambridge will be delivering teaching online in 2020-21 many of our advertisers now see these digital screens as having less of an impact and we are seeing a reduced number of bookings for these advertising slots.

We are expecting a reduction in our Shop Sales due to the following reasons;

- It is unlikely that we will be able to open the physical shop in the SU building until after January 2020 meaning that we will not see students using our Printing and Binding Shop for 1/3rd of the year.
- Due to social distancing regulations we anticipate that colleges will be holding fewer formal events, which will see gown sales and rental reduce significantly.

Bank interest is based on current very low interest rates and is a conservative estimate. The union is currently reviewing its banking arrangements which may yield greater returns in the future, but these must be weighed up against the risk of any investment and the accessibility of funds.

There is a bad debt provision of £1000 which is for debts that are unrecovered within the financial year. This is significantly less than in previous years (£5,000 in 2018 and £3,500 in 2019) as much of the bad debt has been from J/MCRs late/non-payment in the Sky TV scheme which we are now no longer running. This is a conservative estimate and it is likely that bad debt this year will reduce to almost zero given our improved financial processes.
We have made changes to our recruitment plans for staffing and the trustee board has agreed a staffing restructure which will allow us to make savings whilst also delivering against our planned objectives. The proposals are currently under consultation with staff and although they are not expected to produce any redundancies the changes will involve some role expansion and a reduction in the planned recruitment of new staff.

RESERVES

Cambridge SU reserves currently stand at approximately £400,000. The trustees had planned a phased reduction of these reserves over the next 3 years down to between 3 and 4 months running costs. (Approx. £230,000 - £310,000) however the predicted deficit will reduce reserve levels to around £280,000 within the year 2020-21.

CONCLUSIONS

While these are extremely difficult times to be operating in financially, we are confident that this budget will allow Cambridge SU to continue with its core activities and retain financial stability over the course of 2020-21.
### Representation and Campaigns (Direct Costs) - Account Code 250

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Executive Campaign Portfolios UG President</td>
<td>£ 300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Executive Campaign Portfolios PG President</td>
<td>£ 300</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Executive Campaign Portfolios UG Academic Affairs</td>
<td>£ 300</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Executive Campaign Portfolios PG Academic Affairs</td>
<td>£ 300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Executive Campaign Portfolios Welfare &amp; Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Executive Campaign Portfolios BME</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Executive Campaign Portfolios DSO</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Executive Campaign Portfolios Womens</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Executive Campaign Portfolios Part Time Executive</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Elections &amp; Referendums Demos E &amp; R</td>
<td>£ 5,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Big Cambridge Survey Promotions</td>
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<td>10 Council Council Free Budget</td>
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<td>10 Council Council Meetings &amp; Open Meetings</td>
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<td>Notes Campaigns Participatory budget</td>
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<td>Notes Campaigns Emergency fund</td>
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<td>29 Garden Party Venue</td>
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<tr>
<td>29 Garden Party Catering</td>
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<tr>
<td>29 Garden Party Alcohol</td>
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<tr>
<td>29 Garden Party Entertainment</td>
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<td>51 Reclaim the Night Venue</td>
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<tr>
<td>51 Reclaim the Night Promotion and Printing</td>
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<tr>
<td>45 SLTA Venue Hire</td>
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<td>45 SLTA Food</td>
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<td>45 SLTA Drinks</td>
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<td>45 SLTA Flyers &amp; Posters</td>
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<td>45 SLTA Online Advertising</td>
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<td>45 SLTA Certificates</td>
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<td>45 SLTA Programmes</td>
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<tr>
<td>45 SLTA Flowers</td>
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<td>45 SLTA Musician</td>
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<td>53 Yoga Yoga Instructor Costs</td>
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<td>52 Conference Meal vouchers/food</td>
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<td>52 Conference Booklets paper</td>
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<tr>
<td>52 Conference Booklets print</td>
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