



# Graduate Representation: Vision and Strategy

Presented by the Graduate Union  
13 January 2016

# Overview: 5 questions



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



# 1. What is a graduate?

# Graduates are...



proximity to faculty/college  
exams/thesis  
>300 CTF students  
spouse/partner  
~8% have children  
lab-based vs. solo  
location throughout year

term of arrival  
financial security  
familiarity with Cambridge/UK  
87% full time  
13% part time  
non-academic commitments  
local/visiting

educational background  
immigration status  
disability  
41% home  
22% EU  
37% overseas  
drinking/non-drinking

relationship with supervisor  
19% PGT  
81% PGR  
~56% male  
~44% female  
?% other  
teaching responsibilities

need for storage  
transport resources  
carers/dependents





## 2. What do graduates need?

# Graduate needs



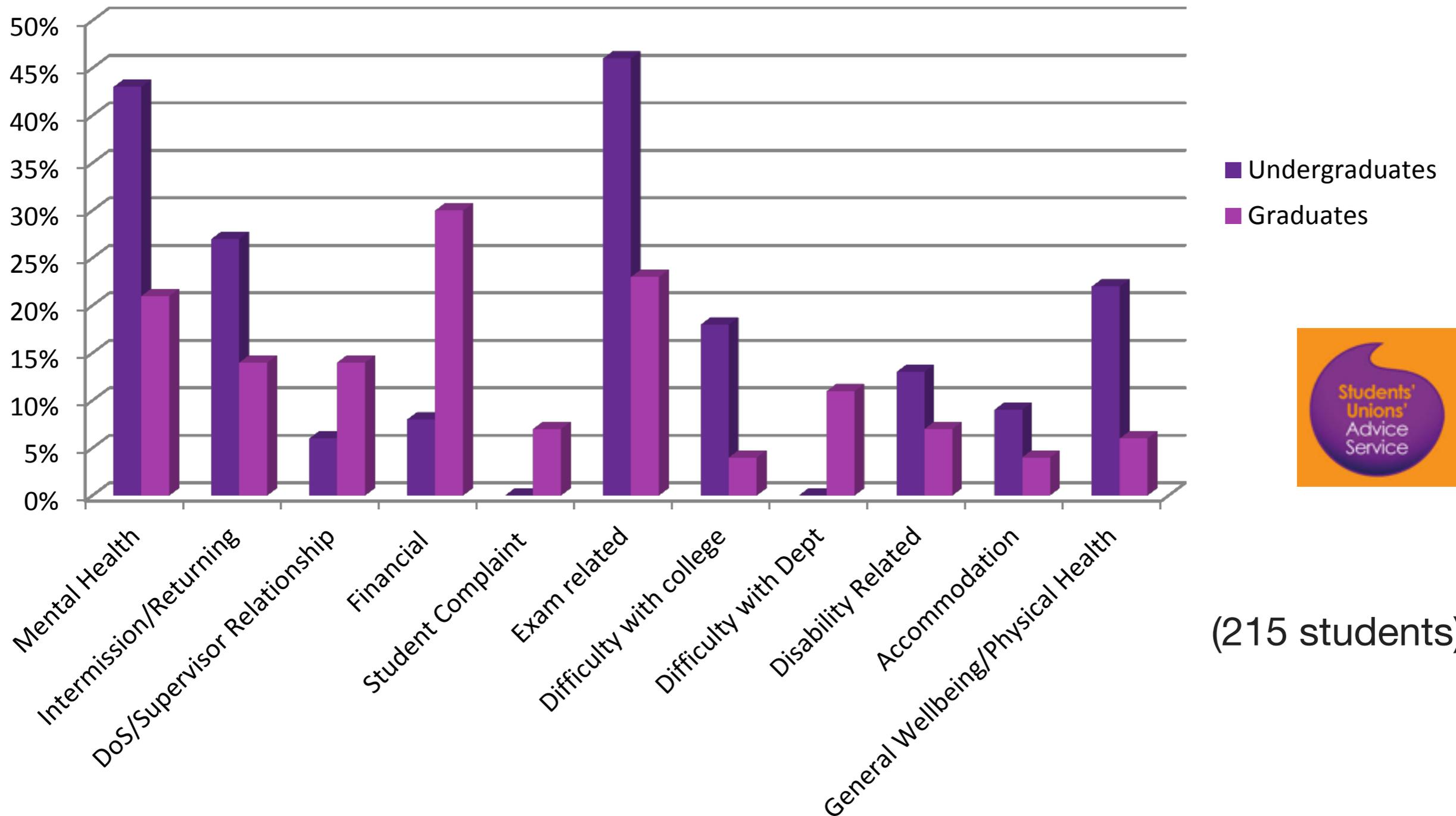
1. Representation – to the university, colleges, faculties
2. Community
3. Welfare support:
  - a. Graduate-specific needs
  - b. Support for marginalised groups
4. Services & practicalities

# Community



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

# SUAS data: Issues by student type 2014-15



# Services & practicalities



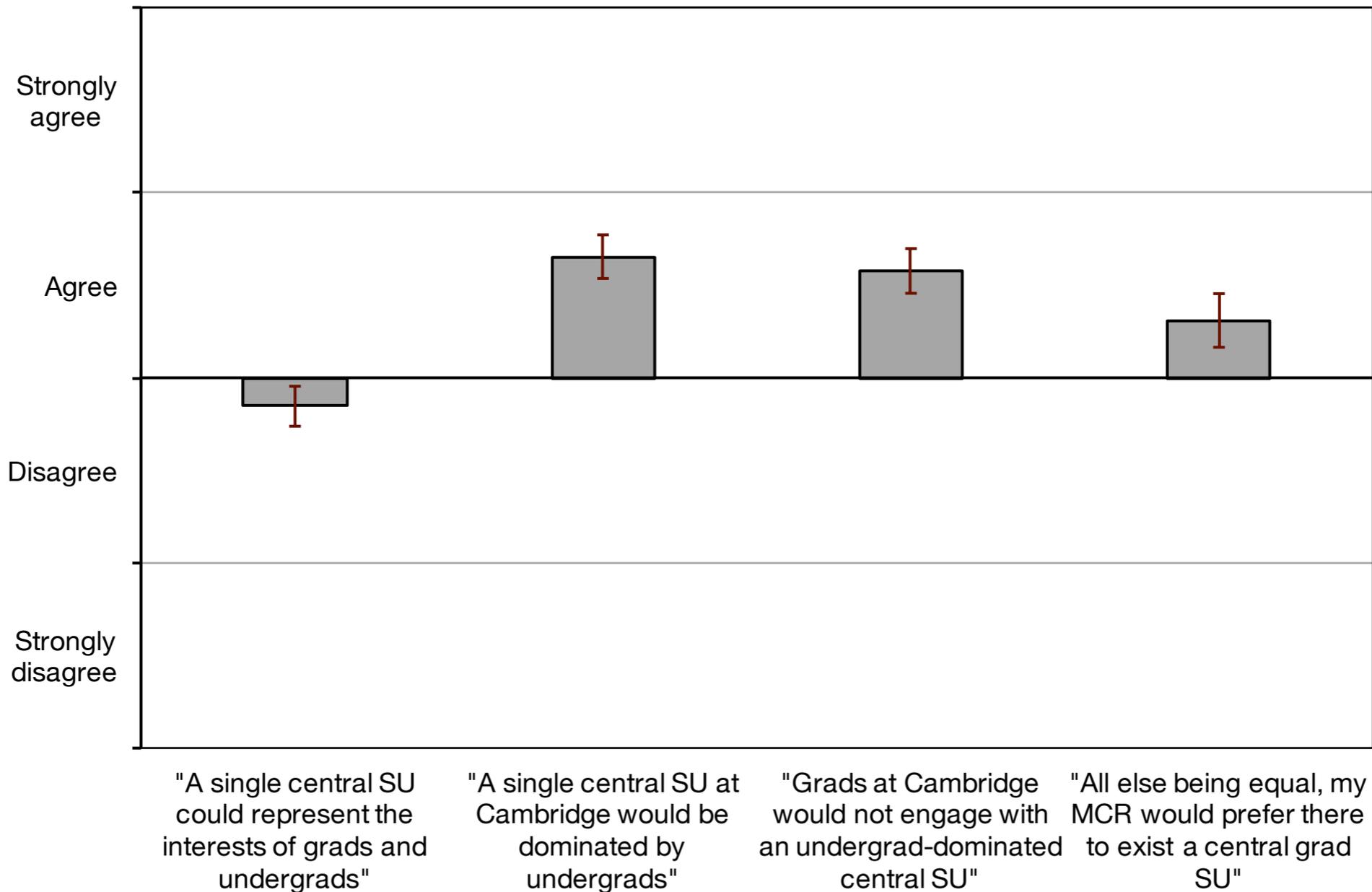
Graduates should have cost effective, easy, accessible and fast services during their studies at Cambridge.

Services should be provided in a one-stop-shop environment. Grads do not have time to waste researching options for idiosyncratic semi-regular services (*e.g.* gown hire) or critical yet rare services (*e.g.* thesis binding).



3. Why are graduates' needs best met by a graduate union?

# Facts on the ground: MCR consultation



# Facts on the ground: Oxford and York



- Oxford – one central union
  - Undergraduate issues dominate and it is difficult to engage graduates
  - Even with a specific graduate-facing role, it is challenging to instil a culture that focusses on graduate issues
- York – a separate graduate union
  - A separate union adds significant value to the graduate experience
  - The union works closely with the other central union (which represents all students), collaborating in a range of areas.

# Operational independence



## Institutional agility:

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

## Specialised operations, prioritising graduates:

- Branding
  - Service hours
  - Funding allocations, officer priorities
  - “Corporate culture”, officer support
  - Institutional memory
- Smaller sabb team works more efficiently, collaboratively, without sidelining areas
- N.B.* not the same as administrative independence (*i.e.* staffing)

# Political independence



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



4. How does the GU  
meet graduates' needs?

# How the new GU meets graduates' needs



1. Representation – to the university, colleges, faculties
2. Community
3. Welfare support:
  - a. Graduate-specific needs
  - b. Support for marginalised groups
4. Services & practicalities

# Representation and Community



- Representation:
  - MCR re-engagement – very positive feedback so far
  - University, colleges, faculties committees
  - Officers for all types of graduate student identity, e.g. student parents – and (crucially) facility to swiftly create/disband these as and when required.
  - Include faculty reps (and faculty officers) in all our work, not just Council
- Community:
  - Has recently been a struggle to make most of central social space
  - Nevertheless: regular film nights, free yoga, parent-toddler mornings, Winter Vac activities, *etc.*

# Welfare support: Current provision



- Graduate-specific needs:
  - Winter Vac activities, SUAS key supporter and ~50% of their activities are with grads (GU would like to contribute more than possible at present)
  - Enhanced health services (prescription collection/delivery, provision of NHS/non-NHS care e.g. sexual health screenings, sexual health deliveries)
- Marginalised groups:
  - Disabilities officer appointment in progress thanks to flexible Executive Committee structure. Graduate students with disabilities are under-provisioned and do not receive satisfactory support, and we have been addressing this.
  - Working with International Students' Team on orientation activities (as well as providing our own supplementary events)

# Services & practicalities: Innovations for this year



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



5. What is the GU's strategy for improvement?

# The GU's strategy for improvement



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

# More effective representation



- 1.5 sabbatical officers cannot possibly:
  - Represent graduate interests at >23 committees
  - Lead the GU (as an organisation/charity)
  - Engage with all students and MCRs
  - Run community-building activities, welfare support, and other important services
- Executive committee comprises volunteer officers, with other commitments — committee often incomplete
- However, addition of Manager role has made a monumental difference

# Governance



- Vice-President:
  - January-December term of office, as opposed to July-July for President.
  - Option unique to graduates, facilitates continuity.
- Executive committee restructuring:
  - End volunteer administration – sabbs/staff to absorb Treasurer/Secretary duties.
  - Appoint *ex-officio*, from PdOC, NVS, CUSU autonomous campaigns *etc.*
  - Remainder elected in Michaelmas (for benefit of PGTs) alongside VP, or appointed as and when required.
- Trustee Board restructuring:
  - Need for more externals, but need to retain student control.
- Work on these matters closely with CCSSU

# Collaboration with CUSU



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

# Services & practicalities: Planned developments



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



Thank you

# Summary



1. What is a graduate?
  - A. Graduates are a very diverse community which escapes generalisation.
2. What do graduates need?
  - A. Representation, community, welfare support, services & practicalities.
3. Why are these needs best met by a graduate union?
  - A. Facts on the ground, expertise & experience, operational and political independence.
4. How does the GU meet these needs?
  - A. Representation, community, welfare support, services & practicalities.
5. What is the GU's strategy for improvement?
  - A. More effective representation, governance reform, collaboration with CUSU, even more services & practicalities.