



GRADUATE UNION

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Confirmed minutes

Graduate Union Council

24/01/18

Graduate Union Lounge, 17 Mill Lane, 7pm

Members Representing Voting constituencies:

Name	Representing
Jonathan Birtwell	CUSU
Hugo Larose	Gonville and Caius MCR
James Gowaith	Fitzwilliam MCR
Juras Mavracic	Robinson MCR
Tiago Barnes	Emmanuel MCR
Rachel Crosby	Newham MCR
Eoin Carter	History of Philosophy of Science
Reece Oosterbeek	BA Society (Trinity College)
Lu Lou	Lucy Cavendish Students' Union
Emma Findlay	Jesus MCR
Jesse Allardice	Samuel Butler Room (St John's College)
Pallavi Panda	Murray Edwards MCR
Sofia Ropek-Hewson	Pembroke Graduate Parlour
Charlotte Payne	King's Graduate Society (King's College)

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Ex-officio

Name	Position
Darshana Joshi	President and Chair
Nikita Hari	Vice-President and Secretary
Mansoor Ahmed	Academic Officer
Bridget Shaffrey	Women's Officer
Amalie Hogert	Mature Undergraduate Officer
Mrittunjoy Guha Majumdar	Welfare Officer
David Chukwuma Izuogu	International Officer

Non-voting members present

Name	College
Margaret Corner	Gates Scholars President
Emma Glennon	Churchill (Gate VP)
Laura Wey	Corpus Christi (VP MCR)

In attendance:

Prof. Graham Virgo	Pro-Vice Chancellor (Education)
Ali Chahine	General Manager and minute taker
Kerri Gardiner	Student Registry/ Board of Graduate Studies



The Chair opened the pre-meeting by welcoming the new Vice President, and asked some of the executive committee to introduce themselves

The Chair asked for a moment of silence for Giulio Regeni, which was observed

She then introduced the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Education, Prof. Graham Virgo. He was asked to give some updates, noting that she was especially interested in how Graduates can some time be forgotten in the University dialogue and how this could be remedied

PCVE noted that the Government had previously not considered postgraduate needs particularly high on the agenda. He continued noting that he had been in his current office for 3 years, with oversight of Undergraduates, Postgraduates and Part-time Students, as well as central Libraries and Sports. Though Postgraduates are an area he has spend a lot of time working on, such as experience and recruitment.

He started by giving a background to what is happening with regulation, noting that the HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England) has being replaced by the Office for Students (OfS) and Research UK. He notes that he has increasing concerns about how it will interact with students, let alone PG students. He notes that ministers seemed surprised at the number of Postgraduates at the University of Cambridge 1. It was noted that this is a concern, as while Education part of a PG student will be under the oversight of the OfS, reporting to the Ministry of Education, the research part would be funded by Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy through Research UK.

He noted that the University is looking to grow PG numbers by 13%, which should equate to 900 extra students per year. He notes that the University at times could be rather lax on recruitment, as it has relied on its reputation, but has not been reaching out as much as it could have in this area. This means it is developing a more ambitious strategy, and is looking to raise £300m towards bursaries so it is affordable to all the best students.

On student Welfare, he noted that students' welfare continues to be an issue. The University as a complex and historic organisation means that the colleges are not always best placed to deliver on PG students . This leads to pressure on the student services, such as careers and libraries. He notes that work is ongoing to improve support, but it needs careful reflection.



He asked to know, what are students concerns?

The President gave the first reply, noting that as seen in the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), the government is interested in the employability of undergraduates, meaning that the system does not recognise the PG, and the importance of their studies.

She further noted that if the University wants to increase Graduate number, there is a need for the University to prepare not just their services to support students, but transferable skills. There are not enough academic jobs currently. Noting that departments tend to shy away from taking responsibilities for such tasks. This surely is leading to severe Graduate Mental Health issues, as many of the solutions tackle the symptoms, not the causes.

Code of Practice

A member noted that one of the big areas that students have concerns is the type of relationship they have with their supervisor. It can at times feel abusive, as the supervisors have the power. He noted the existence of the code of practice, but noting that only 6 out of 22 people in the room had come across it.

They also noted that there is a divide between STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics) and Humanities subjects. In STEM you might need to see your supervisor often, and they will not let you take your allocated leave. This means that students are expected to work like they are being paid, but do not receive any of protection or benefits for example paternity pay. He notes that the Office for Student Conduct, Complaints and Appeals (OSCCA) received 12 complaints last academic year, which shows how powerless students feel in the system.

The President noted that administrators and the Students' Unions' Advice Service note that students normally bring up problems too late in the day due to these issues.

PVCE noted that there were a lot of issues here.

He noted that the intention of the code was to make sure that responsibilities are clear. Though he noted that the code is not very helpful, if it is not widely known across the university. The solution is easy access, a code which is clear, communicated well and transparent.

Kerri Gardiner noted that in the previous meeting they discussed how the code was given to students. She noted that we send it out to departments, and ask them to pass it on. One member noted that she did not get an induction. It



was noted that there is an inconsistency in what is happening in departments, and there was an increased need to work with Directors of Graduate education, as it was suspected that they would not be aware of the code either.

The President noted that as part of the reporting project, if supervisors discussed the code midyear, it would be more effective.

The PVCE noted that the code is a legal contract, but it needed to feel more legitimate to staff and students. Would signing it help?

In reply the President noted that it needs an easy summary, but it needs to be obvious who students turn to when they feel they cannot bring it up with the supervisor. This can lead to less stress on the student.

The PVCE notes that it is assumed the code of conduct was being followed across the university, but this is not the particular case. It may mean that the lack of awareness would stop supervisors knowing about the 8 week rule. KG noted that it may be worth looking again at the wording, and what is promised.

The power relationship with a supervisor

A member asked how many students here would feel comfortable going to their supervisor to ask for time off, 5 out of 20 raised their hands. He then asked, who one could go to if they felt the contract had been broken. It was noted that in would in the first instance be the line manager of the supervisor, though the Board of Graduate Studies was always on hand to advise. One should also approach an adviser, a PI.

A discussion took place weather it should be more formal, as it currently is seen as an informal document, so it is hard to enforce. It was noted that there was a lack of active awareness, and how this could be improved, possibly by signing the document, or another way to ensure. Members noted it was important to have a sense of accountability, as the welfare of students needs to be looked after.

The question was raised, how much welfare responsibility should lay with the faculty, it was felt by members that as many students spent a lot more time in departments, their needed to be more joined up thinking.

Developing this, some asked how could we improve the current 'Graduate Tutorial' system. It was felt that the ability varied by college, and quick fixes would be increasing grad tutors or college counselling, but, are not viable for all colleges. But it was noted that the fundamental break down of relationships happen at a local level, and the student needs to have confidence in the system,



which they seem to not have. It was noted that students feel like they are being merely passed around the system.

Reporting and Supporting Students who received racial harassment, external to University and College Property

One student brought up the fact that they had suffered a number of incidents of Islamophobia, but did not feel able to go to the police, The student noted that a number of students of colour had suffered harassment in Cambridge, and due to the fact it did not happen on university/ college property meant that when the student had tried to bring it up as something they had suffered, there was a feeling that no one took responsibility for supporting the student. The student noted that they have gone to the police, but they do not feel supported. She further elaborated that staff do not need to be experts, but they should have a template on what to do when a student approaches you.

The PVCE noted that if it happened on the University estate it would be dealt with immediately, but notes that as the incidents happened in a public place this was a bit of a grey area. It was noted that OSCCA would be a good place to be referred to, as they would be able to advise. Other areas of assistance were noted as the Head Porter generally have a good relationship with the police or the International student office. It was also mentioned SUAS would also be a good place to be referred to.

Mental health –

PVCE noted that the national statistics of graduates with mental health issues is alarming, and that there are regular meetings with counselling service to discuss growth in numbers about grad students. He noted that he is working closely to find ways forward.

PVCE also added that programmes like mindfulness are developing here, primarily for UG. He added that being a fairly senior, PVC, to make the case, the university is working on an application, specifically applied for this, for PG students.

Since PhD student- supervisor issues can lead to misuse of power by supervisor, it was found that this is an extremely serious situation for PhD students to handle. Situations that lead to falling out with the supervisor can lead to even an end of academic career. Even though suggestions like seeking help from advisor came up, rep from Newnham noted that her supervisor is senior in the dept while her advisor is a lecturer and this doesn't give any power to the advisor to interfere in the affairs of the senior professor.



PVC noted that as the line manager they have responsibility and has to carry that out wherever they belong in the hierarchy.

Regarding reporting ,we did get some positive experience, but mostly people were sceptical, the termly report had issues regarding the timing , frequency and purpose .

Counselling

A member noted that PG students feel they are a less of a priority, especially during exam period, and anecdotally some had been turned away. But it was noted that for a UG seeking urgent seeing, couple of weeks ago was turned away as it was not exam term. So these are dealt case by case as understood from the cases reported.

Arts & Humanities

There is no dedicated space for graduates. Noted that no dedicated space in law. AHSS, stuck with the building we have got. It was noted that there needs to be a reviewing of education space though the whole university like small rooms or learning space or dedicated student space. The best solution proposed was using libraries, and library space and also to reconsider how that space is used. Suggestions of an open plan space, hot desking, working with faculty in? departments was also noted .

It was raised by the President that we have not been performing well on some surveys. The PVC noted that in most of the surveys , we are doing the same as the Russell Group or better, emphasising that 1 or 2 % these surveys always have their problems depending on one year course, doctoral research & high satisfaction.

It was noted that for many students, supervisions very limited in number. There were some students, who have not seen their supervisors for 3 months, students being honest, but in some cases, that is something of this nature. But in STEM, some see everyday.

It was raised whether for going back to contract would solve these issues. Contract needed? Certainly, there would be, expectations, in some, at least every 4 weeks, 18 hours a week.

Transferable skills

It was noted by the Newnham representative, that though the £300m was a positive step, it was felt that students could be better prepared for the job market, as there are not enough academic jobs. Money for PGR students becomes an issue in third year, and generally dries up in the 4th year. As there can be a gap in possibly gaining a post-doc position, this cause real hardship.



She noted that only around 1/10 of French studies academics are able to secure a more long-term role, with the majority having to work elsewhere.

It was raised how support services need to be better staffed, improved recruitment and other support services which are currently clearly insufficient for 800 students.

Accommodation for Students with families,

It was noted that Post-docs get support and are treated as employees with subsidised accommodation in the North West Cambridge site with nursery places. But PG students struggle to find accommodation, with much of college accommodation overpriced. It was asked if the University is willing to do more.

In reply, the PVCE noted that resources are limited though financial support had improved. It was important that students do not feel isolated, and it is why colleges have to lead on this. He noted that we have reached a point where providing accommodation for families is proving a challenge to colleges, and perhaps the University should consider where it can supply in this area. At the moment some accommodation is available to students as individual rooms, but perhaps a block needs to be reserved in future.

How can we change the University culture that sometimes neglects Postgraduates?

The President noted that on the committee she attends (45 as well as 10+ working groups), they feel very UG centric, maybe 80% of the content is UG. She asked specifically what the PVCE will do to help redress the balance.

In reply he noted that today's meeting was a change to influence, his plans working with the Postgraduate Committees we do have. He noted that PG students are different and the distinction is valid. He noted that it would be important to turn things on its head to make sure that all students have a good student experience.

Concluding remarks from the Professor Graham Virgo

list:

- Fundraising to finance PG bursaries
- Student mental health
- Recruitment of PGs
- One form application process for funding –
- International students feel they are welcomed and perceived, is the welcome in the UK generally
- Reviewing that communication strategy.



- Code of Practice reviewing how to practically implement it

Guarantors –rental accommodation

Quick practical challenges was brought up by Lucy Cavendish rep- finding accommodation difficult, not offered to students by private landlords, often internationals cannot find a guarantor, no relatives, we feel this financial risk.



1. Welcome

The Chair noted that we had significantly over run, and would like to rush through the rest of the agenda

2. LGBT+ Officer Co-opted on to the Executive

Council were presented with the motion by Hugo Larose, the Gonville and Caius Representative.

The Chair moved to a vote, but there was an objection from the CUSU representative (grad representative CUSU LGBT+). It was noted that there was a grad representation, and asked what specifically would this position would bring.

The Chair noted that this position would focus more on representing the LGBT community to the Graduate Union, as a separate charity, and should not be seen as attacking current representation but adding to it.

3. Minutes

2 corrections, one due to the representation from Pembroke, and one name correction. With the above corrections, the minutes were approved.

4. Matters arising

As a motion was amended in council previously, council were asked to confirm the agreed wording, which was agreed.

Reports from the Executive Committee

5. President's report

The President noted that she had worked on improving the lighting, bring it up at project boards, as well as with senior managers in the University.

She had also a say on the PG report project, noting councils feedback from the last meeting.

Another area she is looking to develop is the Graduate Mental Health Project. Looking to get data from departments, counselling and advice services. Another arm of this project is looking at how this can be integrated and improves Graduate Supervision.

Student Families is another project she is looking to get data on from the colleges, as this has proven to not be reliable.



The GU, with input from SUAS had been involved in the development of College transfer procedures. She felt that Colleges are looking to protect themselves from OIA (Office of the Independent Adjudicator for HE). The President is looking for avenues to change the current direction of this work.

Finally she noted that she will be on leave from tomorrow, for her weddings in India, so the Vice-President will be providing cover, the General Manager should be contacted for administrative queries, and Hugo Larose for trustee issues.

Vice President

She thanked council for supporting her in taking up her role part-time, and had started her handover on the 13th December. Her main areas of work are on implementing her Manifesto commitments, working with the Exec, and helping the Graduate Union have a loud voice amongst the noise in the university. She will be looking to revamp the website, strategize communications and improve our relationship with the service providers, departments and MCR's. She is also focussing on researching and examining COP and student handbooks for better understanding of the loop-holes and issues in the system. She held one to one meetings with OSCCA, SUAS, Library, CUSU, GU teams .

Executive

Academic Officer- Is looking at student -supervisor issues, and has met the e-thesis team with the VP and is looking ways to get the word out about this. He is also assisting with the 3 minute thesis and how to make it a big event.

Mature Undergraduate Officer is holding a second Mature UG wine and cheese evening, and was hoping to increase the frequency of events.

Part-time welfare – is looking to run a number of events, as well as hosting a welfare hour.

Families officer – will be looking at the issue of intermission and pregnancy as well as paternity leave– She will also be looking at ways career services can support partners of students along with VP.

Women's Officer

Has organised her first welcome event on Sunday 4th event. She would be looking to do a weekly feminist film club, as well as looking to do consent and sexual harassment workshops in colleges for Postgraduates. She will be campaigning on domestic abuse and harassment which is widely over-



looked by the university.

International Officer

Held a newly started lent term welcome event – wants to do more with the International Student team, especially around careers skills. The attainment gaps, as well some ambitious international events. As well as looking at rent guarantor.

Environmental Officer : Is getting in touch with MCR environmental reps and societies to study green practises of colleges and to start a green hour and green campaign later on in the term.

Welfare and Rights Officer-

Had sent her apologies

6. Council Business

Elections update

Council received a paper with the updated election dates from CUSU, which were accepted. Members were asked to promote the elections, especially President and Welfare and Rights Officer, as well as the University Council member.

It was further noted that the Executive would be suggesting appointments of Student, Alumni and External Trustee before June.

7. Emergency motion

8. date of next meeting

9. AOB?

Meeting closed at 21:34