



# **Graduate Union Briefing paper Undergraduates within MCRs**

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## **1. Introduction**

The purpose of this briefing paper is to assist MCRs in their decision-making regarding the inclusion or exclusion of certain classes of undergraduate student from their membership. The paper has been produced in response to repeated controversies within College communities concerning the MCR membership of several classes of student, in order to ensure that future debates can be conducted with as much relevant information as possible.

The ecosystem of courses and degrees at Cambridge is complex. This paper therefore begins by explaining in broad strokes what the various courses relevant to the issue are and how they interact. There is also included a short history of the integrated master's degrees, the better to contextualise their current position within the University. The paper then goes on to outline the various category of undergraduates which may commonly be included in an MCR community, and give guidance about how decisions concerning them can be made fairly and coherently.

## **2. Background and context**

### **2.1 Student status at Cambridge**

There are, broadly, three classes of student at the University: undergraduate students, Graduate Students (note the capitals), and “non-Graduate” postgraduate students. Undergraduate students are those students taking a course of study which does not require a first degree, and are admitted by a College; Graduate Students are those students taking a postgraduate course of study, and who are admitted by the central Board of Graduate Studies; and “non-Graduate” postgraduate students are all those students taking a postgraduate course of study, and who are admitted locally by faculties and departments.

## 2.2 The Tripos system

There is only one standard undergraduate degree at Cambridge, the Bachelor of Arts (BA), and it is awarded in every subject.<sup>1</sup> An undergraduate course leading to the BA is called a Tripos, and each Tripos comprises a number of more-or-less self-contained “Parts” which correspond to a year of study culminating in examinations. A standard three-year Tripos comprises Parts I, IIA and IIB or Parts IA, IB and II.

Each Tripos Part has its own entry requirements and there is therefore a great deal of theoretical flexibility to switch between the Parts of different Triposes during an undergraduate degree. A student is eligible to receive the BA degree if they study in Cambridge for at least nine Terms and successfully pass the exams of Part IIA, IIB or II of any Tripos in their final year. Naturally, a student will have needed to pass the exams of earlier Parts to get to this stage – but it doesn’t matter how they do it.

## 2.3 Overview of Cambridge master’s degrees

There are roughly seven types of master’s course offered by the University:

	<u>Degree</u>	<u>Student status</u>	<u>Fee</u>	<u>Taught or research</u>	<u>Assessment method</u>
<b>Advanced study</b>	MPhil <sup>2</sup>	Graduate	Combined	Mainly taught	Various
<b>Research</b>	MPhil <sup>2</sup>	Graduate	Combined	Research	Dissertation and oral only
<b>Integrated (pre-PhD)</b>	MRes	Graduate	Combined	Mainly research	Various
<b>Integrated (post-BA)</b>	MSt, MMath, MSci, MEng	Graduate or undergraduate	University plus College	Mainly taught	Various
<b>Part-time only</b>	MSt	“Non-Graduate” postgraduate	Combined	Mainly taught	Various
<b>PhD exit</b>	MSc, MLitt	Graduate	Combined	Research	Dissertation and oral only
<b>Specific / professional</b>	MBA, MCL, MEd, MFin, LL.M, MMus	“Non-Graduate” postgraduate	Combined	Mainly taught	Various

Note that the Cambridge Master of Arts (MA) degree is not listed above, as it is not a standard academic qualification: it is rather used to designate senior status within the University (i.e. membership of the Senate) and may therefore be awarded to all those who

<sup>1</sup> A small number of undergraduate students are on courses not leading to the BA. Candidates for the Bachelor of Theology for Ministry (BTh) degree, which is organised alongside the Houses of the Cambridge Theological Federation, are entirely outside of the Tripos system. Clinical medicine and veterinary students are studying towards specialist bachelor’s degrees, but these students have already been awarded the BA for their pre-clinical studies within the Tripos.

<sup>2</sup> There are two distinct types of MPhil course, though both lead to the same degree: MPhil by advanced study and MPhil by dissertation. MPhil courses by advanced study include written papers or coursework, and candidates are assessed as a cohort by a Board of Examiners. Candidates for MPhil by dissertation are assessed by individually appointed Examiners on the basis of their dissertation and oral. See *Cambridge University Reporter*, 2014-15, p 762.

have already been awarded BA once a certain length of time has passed, without the need for any further academic study.

The University has two kinds of integrated master's course: one which is integrated with a preceding BA course, and one which is integrated with a following Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) course. Both kinds of integrated master's degrees afford students the convenience of avoiding applying for a master's course separately between their undergraduate and doctoral studies.

Both flavours of integrated master's courses can be completed independently of their partner courses, but this is less usual than taking them together with either the BA or the PhD. While the pre-PhD integrated master's course results in the same degree (the MRes) whether or not the student goes on to complete the PhD, in the case of the post-BA integrated master's course, a different degree is awarded depending on whether it is taken together with the preceding BA or not.

#### ***2.4 A brief history of the integrated undergraduate master's courses***

The MEng, MSci and MMath are awarded for the completion of an additional Part of the Tripos, in the fourth-year of study, after the candidate has already become eligible to receive the BA the previous year. The MAsT is awarded to students who complete the same year of study, but who have applied from outside of the University after completing their first degree elsewhere.

The practice of Cambridge undergraduates going on to an additional year of advanced study following completion of the BA requirements significantly predates the introduction of these degrees. A fourth year of undergraduate mathematics has existed at Cambridge in some form or another since the late 19th century, currently as Part III of the Mathematics Tripos. Until 2008, completion of this Part was rewarded with Certificate of Advanced Study in Mathematics (CASM); this course was open both to candidates following completion of the BA, and from outside the University. Similarly, the final years of the Chemical Engineering Tripos (introduced in 1948) and the Manufacturing Engineering Tripos (1978), both taken in fourth year, also resulted in Certificates of Advanced Study; though these awards were not available to external candidates.

In 1990, the University replaced the Engineering Certificates of Advanced Study with the Master of Engineering (MEng) degree.<sup>3</sup> The University felt that their certificates were essentially equivalent to the newly proliferating four-year MEng degrees now offered by many other UK universities, and that a change towards the emerging standard was desirable. The introduction of MEng degrees nationwide was a consequence of the influential recommendations of the Finniston Report and the Engineering Council, concerned that the amount of material an Engineering graduate required could no longer be covered in a standard three-year bachelor's.

Following the widespread adoption of MEng degrees, and after similar recommendations were issued from professional and learned scientific societies, four-year first degrees in science and mathematics also became common in the UK university sector. In 1993, the

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<sup>3</sup> *Cambridge University Reporter*, 1988-89, pp 448, 501, 539, 558, 601; 1989-90, pp 378, 632, 667.

University introduced its first Natural Sciences Tripos Part III course<sup>4</sup> and then in 1995 established of degree Master of Natural Sciences (MSci),<sup>5</sup> along similar lines to the MEng.

Over the next decade, as the range of MSci Part III and taught MPhil courses offered by the University expanded, course organisers began to request the option of teaching the two courses in one combined cohort and thereby to allow external candidates to take their Part III master's course. The Faculty of Mathematics also sought to replace their CASM with a Master of Mathematics (MMath) degree, which had become the sector standard, while retaining the option for external candidates to take the course.

A complicating factor was that certain UK universities awarded their equivalents to the MMath, MEng and MSci without an accompanying Bachelor's degree. Awarding external candidates with an MMath or MSci for one year of study might therefore give a misleading impression of how long a course they had studied. The University felt the need to differentiate between the two kinds of course.

The solution found was to introduce the MMath alongside a new Master of Advanced Study (MASt) degree specifically for external candidates taking the final year of an integrated master's course.<sup>6</sup> While MASt students would be Graduate Students, and their results would be graded using the usual Master's scale rather than the traditional classing system, they would form a single cohort of students alongside the integrated master's students taking an otherwise identical course.

### **3. Categories of potential undergraduate MCR members**

#### ***3.1 Fourth-year integrated master's students***

The status of the integrated master's degrees within the University has evolved since their introduction. In 1998, the Council of the Senate reported that they did not consider these qualifications equivalent to a postgraduate master's degree:

Under the provisions of Statute A, I, 6, the holder of any Master's degree is qualified for membership of the Senate; this includes the degrees of M.Eng. and M.Sci., which were introduced in 1990 and 1995 respectively. However, these two degrees, unlike other Master's degrees, are not postgraduate degrees; they are awarded at the end of a four-year undergraduate course, and students who qualify for the M.Eng. or the M.Sci. also qualify for the B.A. Degree at the same time. In view of this, the Council consider it anomalous that these two degrees should be a sufficient qualification for membership of the Senate; [...]<sup>7</sup>

However, in 2010, after the integrated Master's courses had established themselves, the Council changed their view of these degrees and now reported that they were of the same general class as the University's other master's courses. This change was necessitated by

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<sup>4</sup> *Cambridge University Reporter*, 1992-93, pp 467, 543, 545, 619.

<sup>5</sup> *Cambridge University Reporter*, 1993-94, pp 498, 582, 681, 697, 739; 1994-95, p 446.

<sup>6</sup> *Cambridge University Reporter*, 2008-09, pp 338, 455, 575, 584, 612; 2009-10, p 70.

<sup>7</sup> *Cambridge University Reporter*, 1997-98, p 363.

the introduction of the MAST, and the iniquity that would otherwise result between students who had completed the same course but received different degrees of different status:

The course requirements of the M.Eng. and M.Sci., although different to those for the Cambridge M.Phil., conform to the descriptors of the Quality Assurance Agency for a Master's degree. This is also true of the new M.Math. and M.A.St. course requirements. After consultation [...] the Council and the General Board have agreed to propose a change in the qualification for membership of the Senate so that all holders of a Master's degree become members of the Senate. [...] As candidates for the M.A.St. follow the same course as those for the integrated degrees it is only appropriate that they should also become members of the Senate as soon as they have proceeded to the M.A.St.<sup>8</sup>

It is currently the view of the University, as encoded in its Ordinances, that all of its master's degrees (including the MMath, MEng and MSci) are of an equivalent standing and entitle their holders to membership of the Senate.

However, students studying towards these integrated master's degrees remain officially of undergraduate status within the University and are not permitted to proceed to their BA before continuing to the final year. In contrast, candidates for the MAST, despite being in the same cohort and studying the same course, are officially Graduate Students.

The reason for this is a funding technicality. The MMath, MEng and MSci must be awarded together with the BA at the end of the fourth year of study, and cannot be awarded independently. This restriction is in place because, with a few exceptions, the government does not provide tuition fee loans or subsidies for students who already possess a first degree; however, home or EU students who take the integrated master's as part of a single first degree remain eligible for undergraduate financial support. MAST students by contrast are subject to the fee regulations concerning, and eligible to apply to the funding sources available to, Graduate Students<sup>9</sup> (though the level of their fees is set to be identical for those taking an unsubsidised second undergraduate degree).

The treatment of post-BA integrated master's students varies considerably among MCRs. Of the 17 MCRs at Colleges with two combination rooms for which the GU has data, 53% stated that fourth-year undergraduates were represented by their union.<sup>10</sup> Of those who do represent fourth-year undergraduates, many have some kind of opt-in system in place (with or without the need for payment), or else place additional restrictions on the rights of these members.

It is extremely difficult to justify differential treatment of MAST students, MMath students, and those MSci students on courses for which an MAST route is offered: the distinction in their status is merely administrative. For example, because overseas undergraduate students are not eligible for subsidised fees in any circumstances, an overseas mathematics student at a College where the MCR does not allow fourth-year undergraduate membership might (without additional financial burden) simply graduate following their third year and re-join as

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<sup>8</sup> *Cambridge University Reporter*, 2009-10, p 660.

<sup>9</sup> *Cambridge University Reporter*, 2008-09, p 338.

<sup>10</sup> CUSU-GU Annual Return data book, May 2017, question 3.

an MAST, thereby becoming a member of the MCR while the rest of their cohort remains excluded. This is not necessarily to say either that MCRs must permit these integrated master's students to become members, nor that MCRs must exclude MAST students from membership. However, there is little argument for treating the two kinds of student differently.

The case of MEng students and those MSci students on courses for which no MAST route is offered is somewhat different, because these courses do not comprise mixed undergraduate/Graduate cohorts. MCRs therefore have more room to make a decision regarding their inclusion or otherwise without the risk of splitting up cohorts between combination rooms; whether or not it worth the administrative complexity of making a distinction between those integrated master's courses with an MAST route and those without is a decision for individual MCRs.

### **3.2 Clinical medicine/veterinary medicine students**

Counter-intuitively to many, despite already possessing the BA degree (awarded after the first three years of pre-clinical study) all clinical medicine and veterinary medicine students in their fourth or higher years of study officially remain undergraduate students.<sup>11</sup>

Clinical students pay undergraduate tuition fees (or have these paid for them by the NHS), are awarded with further bachelor's degrees at the end of their course<sup>12</sup>, are classed as "undergraduate (other)" on CamSIS, and are not entitled to membership of the Senate by virtue of their final qualifications. Strictly speaking, the clinical medicine course does not result in a doctoral degree – medical practitioners use the "doctor" title by custom. The reason that they are able to receive their BA before the end of their study, unlike post-BA integrated master's students, is that undergraduate medical and veterinary courses are specifically excluded from the government's rules concerning second degrees.<sup>13</sup>

That being said, under the Quality Assurance Agency's framework, medical and veterinary first degrees are accorded the same standing (level 7) as integrated undergraduate and standalone master's courses<sup>14</sup> (corresponding to second cycle qualifications within the Bologna process framework). The situation of clinical medics is therefore very similar to that of MMath, MEng and MSci students.

The status of clinical medics within MCRs is somewhat less divisive than that of post-BA integrated master's students, with 59% of the 17 MCRs at Colleges with two combination rooms for which the GU has data representing clinical students.<sup>15</sup> However, this data may be treated with caution due to the prevalence of the misconception that clinical medics are in fact postgraduates.

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<sup>11</sup> With the exception of those medicine students who study for a PhD between the penultimate and final years of the clinical course, who are Graduate Students during the three years of their PhD.

<sup>12</sup> After completing their clinical studies, medics are admitted to the Bachelor of Medicine (MB) and Bachelor of Surgery (BChir) degrees, vets to the Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine (VetMB).

<sup>13</sup> "Withdrawal of funding for equivalent or lower qualifications (ELQs): outcomes of consultation". 2008/13, Higher Education Funding Council for England, 1 April 2008.

<sup>14</sup> "Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications in England Wales and Northern Ireland", Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, August 2008.

<sup>15</sup> CUSU-GU Annual Return data book, May 2017, question 3.

Whether through deliberate choice or unfamiliarity with their official status, the MCR membership of clinical students is not commonly a cause of controversy. This may be, in part, a consequence of the fact that clinicians generally spend less time in College than other “advanced” undergraduates. Nevertheless, MCRs may wish to ensure that their Constitutions’ membership definitions say what they are intended to say – for example, a clause providing simply that postgraduate students at the College are members of the MCR won’t include clinical students. MCRs also need also to be careful that their decisions don’t have unintended consequences through imprecision – e.g. a vote to grant or withdraw rights to/from “undergraduate members of the MCR” would be applicable to clinical students.

### ***3.3 Mature undergraduates and affiliated students***

Mature undergraduates are those undergraduates who were 21 or more years old when they began their course. Affiliated students are undergraduate students who already hold a degree from another University and are therefore permitted to take their course in one year fewer than usual, and therefore usually only study the last two years of the course.

Mature undergraduates are not postgraduate students. However, a case is often made for their inclusion as MCR members on pastoral grounds, as later-life learners will likely have more in common with a postgraduate rather than an undergraduate community. This fact is illustrated by the fact that there are four Colleges in the University which only admit mature undergraduates and postgraduates.

A stronger argument can be made for classing affiliated students as postgraduates, inasmuch as they have already received a degree from another University. However, they remain on an undergraduate course of study and are classed as undergraduates by the University. Nevertheless, the same pastoral arguments for granting mature undergraduates MCR membership apply to affiliated students.

The Colleges which only admit mature undergraduates and postgraduates have only one students’ union, and therefore mature undergraduates and affiliated students are included in the MCR community necessarily.

### ***3.4 Fourth-year BA students***

As described earlier, the Tripos system affords sufficient flexibility in the route taken towards the BA that it is theoretically very easy to switch between Triposes. This means that, rather than the standard Parts I, IIA and IIB or Parts IA, IB and II routes found within single Triposes, some students end up taking Parts IA and IB from one Tripos and Parts IIA and IIB from another – ending up with a BA which takes four years.

There are a few other Tripos Part combinations that result in a four-year undergraduate course. For example, when switching after the first year into a novel Tripos a student might end up starting again from the first Part of the new Tripos. There also exists the Management Studies Tripos, which comprises only one Part and can be studied as a stand-alone third of fourth year, and which leads to a BA.

As with mature undergraduates, BA students in their fourth year are not in any sense postgraduate students. However, there may be a case for MCRs to consider including these students in their community on the same grounds as mature undergraduates. Another factor

to consider is that any other members of their cohort still at the College are likely to be master's students – a decision to exclude fourth-year BA students from an MCR would therefore likely split up cohorts between combination rooms.

### **3.5 Languages undergraduates**

Students taking the Modern and Medieval Languages (MML) or Asian and Middle Eastern Studies (AMES) Triposes spend a year abroad between their second and third year of study. When they return to their College, the majority of their cohort will have graduated, and any friends made from languages students in the year below them will now themselves be taking their year abroad.

Like other four-year BA students, languages undergraduates in their final year of study cannot reasonably be classed as postgraduate students. However, the same pastoral arguments made in favour of including fourth-year BA students in the MCR community also apply to languages students – even more so, inasmuch as languages students are more in need of the opportunity to form new friendships following their year abroad.

## **4. Final considerations and recommendations**

The intention of this paper is to ensure that debates concerning undergraduate membership of MCR are informed. It is entirely a decision for each individual MCR how it wishes to define its own membership and community. Indeed, so long as no student at a College is ineligible for both JCR and MCR membership, Colleges should not stand in the way of an MCR seeking to define its membership as it sees fit. However, such decisions should be taken with the long-term representational and social interests of different categories of students in mind, not in response to one-off events or for short-term political expediency.

An important, but within this paper so far ignored, factor in debates on MCR membership is resource; the broader an MCR's membership is defined, the larger the number of members being supported from the same budget. However, there are several examples across the Colleges of JCRs and MCRs splitting the resource hypothecated towards undergraduate members of the MCR, which may be a broadly suitable way of resolving this issue.

Another issue is voting rights, and the perceived problem of double-representation. There are three solutions to this concern: (1) all students could be obliged be a member of either the JCR or the MCR only; (2) while certain students might be part of both communities (through e.g. affiliate membership), all students might have voting membership of only one; or (3) it could be accepted within the College as reasonable for students who straddle the communities to be enfranchised in both.

It is strongly recommended that, whatever MCRs determine about their own membership, they should seek to be consistent across similar kinds of students. For a number of reasons, this may not always be practical; but in those circumstances, it is hoped that this paper will assist in developing a membership policy which is well-informed and as consistent as practically possible. This policy should be unambiguously worded and included as part of an MCR's Constitution. The appendix to this paper comprises a membership policy template with suitable forms of words for MCRs to adapt as they see fit.



## **Appendix: Template membership policy**

### **1. Template framework**

- (1) *Membership of the MCR is automatically granted to any member of the College who:*
- (a) *is currently pursuing a postgraduate course of study in the University, or*
  - (b) *is currently pursuing an undergraduate course of study in the University, and:*
    - (i) *[Conditional statement],*
    - (ii) *[Conditional statement], or*
    - (iii) *[Conditional statement].*
- (2) *Membership of the MCR ceases upon the member's completion of their course of study, death, resignation in accordance with the College's Code of Practice issued under the Education Act 1994, or expulsion from the MCR in accordance with any disciplinary procedure adopted by the MCR.*

### **2. Possible conditional statements for undergraduate students**

#### **2.1 Mature or Affiliate undergraduates**

*"was 21 years old or older when their course of study began"*

This would capture all mature undergraduates, as reckoned by the University.

*"was 21 years old or older at the start of their current year of study"*

This is a broader definition that would capture mature undergraduate, along with many other undergraduates who would reach the threshold age during their course of study.

*"is an Affiliate Student"*

This captures Affiliate Students, who already have a degree and are eligible to take an undergraduate degree in one year fewer than usual.

*"has already been awarded a degree by any University"*

This is a broader definition that captures all those who would have been eligible to become Affiliate Students, whether or not they are. It would also capture clinical students, because they are admitted to the BA at the end of their third year.

#### **2.2 Integrated master's students**

*"whose current year of study is also available to be pursued as a stand-alone postgraduate course of study"*

This is narrow definition that seeks only to take those integrated master's students who have postgraduate course mates. While a coherent definition, it is likely to cause confusion within your College to those unfamiliar with the Cambridge degree ecosystem – your MCR will likely need to be able to explain which courses you wish to be included each year.

*“would become eligible to proceed to a master’s degree upon obtaining honours in the examinations taken during their current year of study”*

This is a somewhat less narrow definition than the above, referring to any integrated master’s course, whether or not it is available to external candidates. It is also more likely to be readily understood.

### **2.3 Fourth-year undergraduates**

*“is in their fourth or higher year of study”*

This definition is the broadest, and would include all fourth-year undergraduates (or higher), including returning MML or AMES students and clinical students.

*“is in their fourth or higher year of residence”*

This definition would exclude returning MML or AMES students, who remain students but are not in residence during their year abroad.

### **2.4 Clinical students**

*“is currently pursuing a course of clinical study leading to a degree in medicine or veterinary medicine”*

Including this is only necessary if none of the other conditional statements which catch clinical students are included; however, it may be useful to include for the avoidance of doubt.

## **3. Accompanying notes**

This template is provided for illustrative purposes only, and is intended to be useful guidance even if not adopted. MCRs should always consult with their College’s bursar and senior tutor before changing their membership policy, as Colleges may have their own preferred forms of words for categorising students. While, politically speaking, it is a decision for MCRs as to who to include, legally speaking, a College’s governing body must approve any changes to an MCR’s governing document.

If adapting this template, it is recommended to avoid using the traditional terms “Graduate Student” and “*in statu pupillari*”. The former refers to a very specific class of postgraduate students, and it is unlikely that any MCR would intend to exclude “non-Graduate” postgraduate students from their membership. The latter, while historically referring to the status of being a student, is not suitable for use by MCRs as the University definition<sup>16</sup> excludes all students who are members of the Senate (i.e. who have a master’s degree from

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<sup>16</sup> At the time of writing, Statute A X 2(b) provided that “the term ‘*in statu pupillari*’ shall mean a member of the University (in which term shall be included a member of a College, or of an Approved Society, resident in the University with a view to matriculation) who has not been admitted to an office in the University (or to a post in the University Press specially designated under Statute J 7 or to an appointment approved by the University for the purpose of Statute A III 10(e)), or to a Fellowship or office of a College, or to a degree which qualifies the holder for membership of the Senate under Statute A I 7(c), and is of less than three and a half years’ standing from admission to her or his first degree (if any)”.

the University); in addition, some Colleges either provide their own definition which clashes with the University definition, or else misinterpret the phrase by assuming it refers to all students, leading to confusion. It is probable that both terms will be phased out by the University over time.

Lastly, this template membership policy makes no attempt to account for visiting students who are not formally members of a College. This is another issue that needs to be considered locally, as Colleges will have different schemes for welcoming temporary visitors into their community, and MCRs may or may not wish for these students to have voting rights in their union.