Graduate Union
Minutes of a Meeting of the Student Council

Held at 7pm on 12 June 2017, in the CUSU/GU Lounge at 17 Mill Lane

Voting members of Council present:

Representing the Affiliated Common Rooms:

- Tom Chudley (Downing MCR)
- Lucy Cunningham (Gonville and Caius MCR)
- Jack Fraser (Sidney Sussex MCR)
- Souradip Mookerjre (St. Catharine’s MCR)
- Jesse Allardice (St. John’s SBR)
- Reece Oosterbeek (Trinity BA Soc)
- Sebastian Wrobel (Wolfson College Students’ Association)

Representing the Faculties:

Voting members of Council present by proxy:

Representing the Affiliated Common Rooms:

- Ettie Unwin (Jesus MCR)
- Anjalene Whittier (King’s MCR)
- Rachel Crosby (Newnham MCR)

Representing CUSU:

- Amatey Doku (CUSU President)

Non-voting members of Council present:

- Chad Allen (President)
- Ellie Chan (Vice-President)
- Sophie Buck (CUSU-GU Welfare & Rights Officer)
Other GU Members in attendance:

- Tim Watson (Corpus Christi)
- Luis Nobre (Darwin)
- Jennifer Holian (Jesus)
- Katherina Menelaou (Newnham)

Also in attendance:

- Rob Richardson (GU Manager – acting as Secretary)

The Council appointed the President to Chair the meeting.

The Council confirmed that the proxies of voting members of the Council count towards quorum.

There were 11 voting members of Council (or their proxies) present, so the meeting was quorate.

Meeting opened at 19.05

1. Approval of the minutes of the previous Council meeting

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 08 May 2017 were approved.

2. Matters arising from the minutes of the previous Council meeting

The President noted that the by-election for the office of GU President had been completed since the last meeting of the GU Council, and that the full Returning Officer’s report would follow at the next meeting; Darshana Joshi had been elected GU President and would take office on 15 July, after a two week period of handover beginning on 1 July.

3. Reports to Council from Sabbatical Officers and Officers of the Executive Committee

The President had been turning attention to the upcoming handover period and had been preparing induction material for the incoming President. Additionally, since the last meeting, the audit of the GU’s accounts for the 15-16 financial year had been finalised and submitted to the Charity Commission.

The Board of Trustees had spent time planning with the Students’ Unions’ Advice Service for the 17-18 academic year, and the President had written a number of internal policy papers that would be discussed by the Board this week. The GU’s governance framework continued to strengthen and this would afford future officers an important framework for developing the organisation.

The President continued to work on a proposal to secure collegiate funding for the central unions, but this had stalled and had not been passed by the Senior Tutors’ Welfare and Finance Committee,
which meant it could not be discussed at the full Senior Tutors’ Committee. He would keep Council informed of progress on this.

The Welfare and Rights Officer (W&RO) had been pulling together welfare resources in order to signpost students to sources of support, and these had been made available online via the GU and CUSU websites. The welfare grid - a political tool for J/MCRs showing how their college differed from others and to help them enact change within their college - was being compiled and would be available in the coming weeks. She had also been working on a confidentiality policy for colleges which had been finalised and was available on the designated Senior Tutors’ website.

The Vice-President continued to work on the GU’s contribution to the University’s Postgraduate Open Day. The University’s coordinator of the open day had left their role and the University was currently hiring a replacement, so progress had stalled temporarily. She was seeking feedback from members as to the most appropriate role for colleges and MCRs within the open day; University figures had expressed mixed views about the usefulness of college involvement given the nature of the postgraduate experience.

She had also been working on plans to introduce supervisor training and had been liaising with individuals in the University on developing these ideas.

MCRs were encouraged to promote the upcoming trip to Stonehenge trip on 23 June, as well as the event concerning women in academia on 26 June.

4. Motions to be ratified

There were none.

5. Council discussions and questions to Council

   a) Audited accounts 2015-16

Circulated were the audited accounts for the 2015-16 financial year (C.170612.A). The GU was putting in place new processes for undertaking its accounting and budgeting so that Council would have greater input, and it was planned that Council would receive the final accounts earlier next year. The submission to the Charity Commission was, however, in advance of the official deadline.

   b) Undergraduates within MCRs

A paper concerning undergraduates within MCRs was circulated (C.170612.B). The President felt that, from his experience of being an MCR President, it would be useful for MCRs to have information regarding the status of undergraduate members, as this was a debate that occurred on a fairly regular basis. Due to the number of different categories of undergraduate student (such as mature undergraduate, those on an integrated master’s course, or clinical students), MCRs were
inconsistent in how they treated these individuals, and it was likely that groups with similar characteristics were treated differently for no defensible reason.

The CUSU President asked whether there may be funding implications for CUSU and the GU depending on the size of the memberships of J/MCRs. It was noted that this could be the case; but it was hoped that given colleges should be funding either a J or MCR for provisions for their students any potential change should not cause a drastic issue relating to resource.

Members noted that colleges also seemed to treat some categories of undergraduates inconsistently, in line with the points made in the paper.

Council felt the briefing document to be useful and would welcome similar documents in the future.

The President planned to develop the contents of the paper into a more formal policy.

6. Ordinary motions

(a) Advice Service caseworkers

The following motion was put to the Council:

*Whereas:*

- The Advice Service provided by the Graduate Union and CUSU formally comprises, at present, two professional caseworkers and four sabbatical officer caseworkers (of which three are CUSU officers, one is the CUSU-GU Welfare & Rights Officer, only one of whom has ever been a postgraduate student);
- Postgraduate students are more likely than undergraduate students to make use of the Advice Service, representing c.45% of the student body but c.50% of the service users;
- CUSU have expressed to the Graduate Union their intention to transition towards only having professional, specialist caseworkers, under a service which remains primarily directed by sabbatical officers including the GU Vice-President, and the Graduate Union Board of Trustees have accepted this proposal;
- The Graduate Union Board of Trustees have offered to provide the additional funds required to employ a third professional advisor for the first half of the incoming Welfare & Rights Officer’s term of office to ensure a continuity of service capacity as sabbatical officer advisors withdraw; and
- The University-provided trial funding for the Vice-President will run out at the end of Michaelmas 2018;
Resolved:

- That the Council support the Board of Trustee’s decision to accept the transition towards an Advice Service with only professional caseworkers, and therefore not to require the incoming Welfare & Rights Officer to undertake student casework through the Advice Service; and
- That the incoming President should, in collaboration with CUSU, review the portfolios held by GU Officers in the context of a Advice Service with no sabbatical officer caseworkers and a potential reduction in total officer funding, and report back to the Council in Michaelmas Term 2017.

Submitted by the President

The President spoke to the motion and stated his belief that, if the resource was available, it was desirable for advice given to members by the central unions to be provided by professional advisors as opposed to sabbatical officers.

The GU had been able to use unanticipated surplus from 15-16 to fund continuation of a third full time advisor for six months. It was hoped that this could be continued long term, although the six month trial allowed for a review point at which to assess the situation. The President was in favour of the motion and felt that professional advice was always likely to be of a higher standard than that administered by sabbatical officers; the counter argument was that students had, in the past, also valued peer support. The Welfare & Rights Officer felt that peer advice was inherently more risky and that graduate students were a particular disadvantage in being advised by sabbatical officers, as the CUSU sabbatical officer positions that have previously been trained to give advice tend to almost entirely be filled by undergraduate students.

In response to a question regarding the sabbatical role that currently gave advice, the President noted that the profile of the individuals in these roles varied each year. Some had been keen to act as caseworkers, but many had struggled in the roles and therefore the training and investment the role holders needed in order to fulfil casework duties was not worthwhile in relation to the value derived from their advice during the year.

The President invited any questions, comments or speeches against the motion. The W&RO noted that sabbatical officers would retain oversight of the SUAS and ensure that the service was student-led; this channel of communication runs two ways as input from sabbatical officers helps the advisors, and experience of advisors helps inform the political work of sabbatical officers.

A vote was taken: ten votes in favour; none against. The motion passes.
b) Policy review

The following motion was put to the Council:

Whereas:

- The Constitution requires the Council to conduct a rolling review of Policy, such that all Policy is reviewed prior to the fourth anniversary of the date on which it was adopted;
- All Policy adopted before the start of the 2013-14 academic year has already been renewed or revoked, and the minutes of all Council meetings since then are publicly available on the Graduate Union’s website; and
- The Vice-President, as Chair of the Executive Committee, has reviewed the minutes of all Council meetings held during the 2013-14 academic year and found no Policy which remains useful;

Resolved:

- That all Policy adopted prior to the start of the 2014-15 academic year be revoked.

Submitted by the Vice-President

The Vice-President noted that it appeared there was no policy that remained current or useful from records of Council meetings held during the 2013-14 academic year, and therefore proposed all policy prior to the start of the 2014-15 academic year be revoked.

There were no speeches against the motion.

A vote was taken: nine votes in favour; none against. The motion passes.

7. Emergency motions

There were none.

8. Elections by Council

9. Dates of upcoming meetings

The dates of upcoming meetings of GU Council are as follows:
Council minutes, 12 June 2017

*Long vacation:*
Monday 10 July 2017
Monday 4 September 2017

*Michaelmas Term:*
Monday 16 October
Monday 4 December 2017
All at 7pm in the GU Lounge

10. Any Other Business

There was none.

Meeting closed at 19:35