

## Minutes – GU Council on 2/09/19

Present:

|                         |                                   |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Orla Woodward           | Jesus College MCR, VP             |
| Alberto Ippolito        | Pembroke College GP, External Rep |
| Edward Parker Humphreys | CUSU, President                   |
| Chris Mellon            | Fitzwilliam College MCR, VP       |
| Simone de Rijk          | Clare Hall GSB, President         |
| Ryan Prestil            | Darwin College, President         |
| Jacob Deasy             | Magdalene College MCR, President  |
| Daniel Whitaker         | Clare College MCR, VP             |
| Stella Swain            | GU, Welfare & Rights Officer      |

In Attendance:

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Alessandro Ceccarelli   | GU, President and Acting Chair of Council   |
| Ted Tregear             | Trinity College & CUCU Exec, voting as a proxy for Tamzin Byrne, Murray Edwards MCR President |
| Verner Viisainen        | Pembroke College GP President   |
| Jess O'Brien            | CUSU, Disabled Students' Officer  |
| Efthimios Karayiannides | Magdalene College MCR, VP   |
| Ali Chahine             | GU, General Manager   |
| Matt Kite               | GU, Postgraduate Engagement Coordinator and minute-taker                                      |

The President welcomed the attendees to the first council of the new GU team, and welcomed CUSU representatives to the meeting. The attendees introduced themselves to the room.

It was noted that the meeting was not quorate, but that the council would proceed anyway, taking indicative votes where appropriate.

### 1. Objections to the Order of Items on the Agenda

The Council agreed to move item 7d. to be taken after item 6, in order to allow a smoother discussion of the proposals.

## **2. Approval of the Minutes of the Previous Council Meeting**

One comment was received in advance from the Murray Edwards MCR President amending the minutes regarding the proposal for a new union. The unconfirmed minutes had recorded that students at Murray Edwards had a negative impression of the new SU project, when in fact they are generally happy to move forward with the proposals. The intended point had been that some students have been overwhelmed by the complexity of the situation and so had disengaged from the consultation process.

There were no other comments on the minutes.

## **3. Matters Arising from the Minutes of the Previous Council Meeting**

### **a. Ratification of resolutions of the previous meeting**

As the meeting was inquorate, the resolutions of the previous meeting could not be ratified.

## **4. Reports from Sabbatical Officers and Officers of the Executive Committee**

### **a. Report from the President (*Verbal Report*)**

It has been a busy summer with University meetings, team management of the GU, and student facing projects falling into the following five categories:

- The Postgraduate Experience
- Stronger Voice for Students
- Access and Participation
- Equality and Diversity

On the postgraduate experience, the President had been working on reviewing self-evaluation on CamSIS, improved and possibly mandatory training for supervisions at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, preventative strategies for PhD student welfare, and the GU was running a panel series on students' experiences of fieldwork.

Work was ongoing on improving the student voice at a University level, especially within the Equality & Diversity portfolio, and significant amounts of work had also been undertaken on the proposals for a new Students' Union. (See item 6)

On Access & Participation, recruitment would begin soon for a new officer working at a University level specifically on postgraduate widening participation for the first time, and the GU had begun collaborating with the University on improving the system for allocating and allocating funding via a single, central, accessible portal.

Regarding Equality & Diversity, it was hoped that confirmation would soon be received of a new committee at University level for Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation, and conversations had been started with the Cambridge Centre for Teaching and Learning on a project on diversifying curricula.

The President had also been working on promoting awareness of the Students' Unions' Advice Service among postgraduate students, and on improving the relationship the GU has with academic reps.

### **b. Report from the Vice-President**

A written report was received from the Vice-President. His campaigns work included:

- Housing and Living Expenses
- Graduate Rights including good supervision
- Race equality

Three campaigns are to be launched on these themes. The housing and Graduate Rights campaigns have been ongoing pieces of work for the GU for some time, and included work with UCU on a number of issues around pay and supervision. The new campaign, CREATE, will concern unconscious bias, improving the awareness of issues faced by BME students and empowering the GU's BME Officer role.

**c. Report from the Welfare & Rights Officer (*Verbal Report*)**

The Welfare & Rights Officer has been starting her role with training and beginning her main campaigns:

- Support for student sex workers
  - Also linking into national campaigns on sex work
- Working with UCU on Raise the Bar and the gender pay gap
- Supporting survivors of sexual violence, especially in the light of recent events relating to the university disciplinary procedure
- Anti-racist campaigns including raising awareness of racism in Cambridge, and a standardised central racial harassment policy. Her Part-Time Executive Officer from the CUSU BME Campaign was also a part of this work.
- Opposing Prevent, which is racist legislation that disproportionately affects Muslim and BME students

She is also setting up events for the next term and working with the GU Families Officer on supporting student families and parents at the university, in particular with childcare and university cards for partners of students.

**d. Report from the Campaigns committee (*Verbal Report*)**

Campaign funds from the GU can be applied for by members. Money assigned last year to Laura Gomez is being used to set up a panel series in November on issues related to PGR students and fieldwork. She is currently looking for panel chairs and speakers for those events, and attendees were invited to get in touch if interested.

The UCU graduate representative encouraged representatives to participate in the UCU Raise the Bar campaign, and distributed materials to attendees. The Raise the Bar campaign ties together anti-casualisation work between different unions. For graduate students it is about greater transparency about allocation of teaching to avoid patronage, guaranteeing contracts for teaching staff to increase security. It also involves postdocs and other precarious staff.

The Pembroke GP External Rep asked the WARO whether there would be projects based on the Mental Health survey conducted last year happening this year. The WARO said that this would be something she would be keen to pursue, working with the CUSU DSO. The President added that the report is available online, that representatives could use it in their campaigning, and that the GU was currently making use of it in campaigns including one motion later today. It would also feed into the CREATE campaign and the University Race Equality Chartermark committee. Its findings about mental health in the LGBTQ community would be a project for the likely new GISOC in the coming months.

## **5. Items for Discussion**

### **a. Opportunities for informal discussion between MCR and JCR Representatives**

The room was invited to comment on ways to improve the relationship between the GU and MCRs with JCRs. This was a short term project, not looking ahead to the new union but to this year. CUSU run a successful college forum which is open to JCRs and MCRs, and the President wanted to solicit opinions on what would be useful.

The Pembroke GP External Rep said that MCRs would be more likely to participate in the College Forum if it were joint CUSU- GU. The CUSU President said that he was keen to have more MCRs attend, and that he hoped to work more to directly reach out to MCRs as their attendance was valued and had been useful.

The Fitzwilliam College MCR VP said that informal working with their JCR was frequent, but there was no structure for this. The feeling was echoed the Magdalene College MCR President. At Pembroke there were joint meetings between the college and the JCR and MCR twice a term, and these were felt to work well for college issues. These meetings had also led to a better relationship outside of formal structures with college.

The GU President reported that the unions were also working on joint forums and training for academic reps and that this would dovetail with plans for MCRs. One issue with this was that there were ever more platforms for discussion, and that the college forum could be one more. There was a worry that for PG students the frequency of these meetings could be too much. UG students also tend to meet only within term times, while PG students work all year round, so there is an issue of compromise between the two students.

The CUSU DSO raised that many UG students, such as estranged and disabled students, do stay here all year and can also be isolated, so the Unions running events in the vacations could be a very positive thing for those students.

The Jesus College MCR President said that these meetings should not be too often as this can dilute the number of people that attend, and suggested once per term.

The CUSU President said that while College Forum meets 4 times per term in Michaelmas and Lent and twice in Easter it is very informal and people were encouraged to attend when they have items to discuss, which was often on an ad hoc issue-focussed basis. They are also time-limited and worked quite well as a social occasion and opportunity to mix between common rooms. He agreed it would be worth looking at running some events outside term focussed on PG issues, as with academic forum.

The Clare Hall GSB President asked if votes can be held at meetings held outside term. It was clarified that the meetings function in parallel to GU Council so they are more informal, and there is less need to vote on issues. A compromise has been reached with academic forum which includes meetings in term and specific PG meetings in the vacations.

## **6. Update on GU-CUSU project on a “New Union”**

The President gave an update on work on developing proposals for a New Union.

- There have been working groups to discuss aspects of the new project, which was complex. It has been an eventful month with improvements on many aspects.
- There have been some changes to aspects of the original proposals.
  - Discussions on the structure of the new union have looked to find a compromise between the two existing unions, as well as taking opportunities to do things in new and more efficient ways.
  - On sabbatical officers, there was no change from the original plan.
  - There had been discussion about the Executive, particularly the liberation campaigns. Within the GU there are Executive Officers with portfolios, whereas CUSU have a model of sabbatical-led teams and semi-autonomous campaigns. We have reached an agreed structure which is more similar to CUSU, while working on mechanisms to include PG students as co-leaders in these campaigns. This would empower the existing officers while giving them more resources including staff time, funding and volunteers.
  - Different models for the council have been explored including one council, two councils and hybrids of the above. There has been an appetite for a shared council, as recent years have shown good constructive collaboration between JCR and MCR representatives. The new council will include JCR and MCR reps, student reps from the councils of the schools, and the sabbatical officers and executive of the new union. The details of this council are still to be resolved, but it will be balanced between undergraduates and postgraduates.
  - An early draft of the constitution has been prepared which will be shared with students for consultation once it is ready.
  - The GU's Board of Trustees has discussed the plans, and there was consensus that this is a positive project. They have scrutinised and approved the business case for the new union as well as the draft democratic structure.
- There are also risks to the project, including some areas that still need more work, in particular to guarantee the representation of PGs in the council, exec and campaigns. The work being done this year on forums is part of this.
  - There is need to finalise agreement on the structure as well as to polish the constitution.
  - More work is needed on the process of conducting the merger to safeguard the GU team and maintain accountability.
  - Welfare, functionality and sustainability of the GU team are also concerns as this is a complex project taking a lot of work, and will continue to be so. There is also a small sacrifice of work on postgraduate issues this year while resources are spent on the project, but it is hoped that this will pay off in the longer term.

The Magdalene College MCR President raised concerns about the safeguarding the voice of postgraduate in the council of the new union. The GU President confirmed that this concern was shared by others, and that the working group was exploring mechanisms with quoracy and the voting system to ensure that postgraduates had a strong voice in the new union. The CUSU President added that engaging MCRs in council was something CUSU had historically

done badly, but the experience of recent councils was that with targeted engagement MCRs were engaging much more. The new union also had the potential to increase turnout from MCRs at council by eliminating duplication of meetings.

The Magdalene College MCR President raised a concern about the amount of business that the new Council might have to consider, and asked about what could be done to streamline this. The GU President confirmed that this was being considered, and that scenario testing would be undertaken to ensure this would not be a problem. College and academic forum will also take some discussions elsewhere so that council becomes more focused. The CUSU DSO raise that there was also scope for reducing duplication here as there would be closer working between undergraduate and postgraduate executive officers.

The concerns were shared by others in the room, and the GU President committed to raise them with the working group at its next meeting. The Pembroke College GP External Rep asked whether quoracy could vary between motions to ensure that decisions were made representing the appropriate groups of students. It was felt that this might be overly complex, but it would be raised with the working group.

The Fitzwilliam College MCR VP asked if students are affiliated research institutes would be represented by the council members from the schools. The GU President confirmed that they would, and agreed that finding ways to better include these would be important.

## **7. Ordinary Motions to Council**

### **a. Motion to Support Fair & Equal Pay**

The Welfare & Rights Officer spoke in favour of this motion, which was to be viewed in the context of an upcoming UCU ballot on issues including pay, contract, gender pay gap and workloads. She reported that all these issues affect PGs who teach, some disproportionately.

- There has been a large real terms pay cut in the HE sector, and the gender pay gap in Cambridge is worse than the sector average.
- There are ongoing links between the GU and Cambridge UCU which have been good and the GU should continue to support them more.
- The GU has a standing Memorandum of Understanding with CUCU from Michaelmas Term 2018, an existing policy on fair pay and another on supporting graduate students as workers.
- There is precedent for working with UCU and we should support them in the ballot and, in the event of its success, to support them in industrial action.

The CUCU PG rep expressed gratitude for the proposal of the motion, and explained that this ballot was one of two ballots running concurrently, one on pay and the other on the USS pension scheme. The pay and equality ballot is a new issue and especially resonant for postgraduates, but it is closely connected to the USS issue. In order for the ballot to be successful there must be a 50% participation rate, which did not happen on the previous ballot, but this time the UCU branch will find out how many people in Cambridge voted on the issues. This will be a strong tool in future negotiations, even if the ballot is not a national success.

The Pembroke College GP External Rep expressed surprise that there was a gender pay gap among students who work. The GU President agreed that this was unacceptable and reported that this was something that the university was now considering through its gender pay gap committee. There would hopefully be additional student reps on this committee.

The Magdalene College MCR President raised a question about whether this included only university employees or students too, and whether there were discrepancies

within departments. It clarified that this ballot was only about university work, but that the issues also stretched to college work and there were gender pay gaps at every level.

An indicative vote was taken on the motion:

In favour:10

Abstentions: 0

Against:0

**b. Motion on Training for Good Supervision (see also Appendix A: Campaign for Supervisor Training)**

The GU President spoke in favour of this motion, which related to an earlier question about how the GU was using data from the mental health survey. These data along with other sources were used to prepare the report in Appendix 1 of the papers. This motion looks at preventative strategy to support students in problems caused by supervision, and was being pursued alongside improvements to reactive services. The aim is to shift the narrative to one shared responsibility between students and supervisions, including by introducing comprehensive training for supervisors to better fulfil their obligations with respect to career development the code of practice etc.

There will also be consultation on what sorts of training would be useful and valuable to be taken back to the university.

The Clare MCR VP raised scepticism about whether supervisors would be likely to engage with any training, as there was no culture of training being desired. The GU President shared this concern, as it is difficult to create a cultural change. The GU is looking at compulsory training but there need to be intermediate steps to that point to bring people with the campaign raising awareness and approaching the issue more softly. Concerns remained, especially with respect to more established members of staff and their willingness to participate. The Council agreed that this was the right approach, and that culture change would take time and was likely to begin with new supervisors.

The Pembroke GP External asked if action could be taken to help existing and future students by describing and setting expectations, in addition to focussing on supervisors. The GU President confirmed that other preventative strategies to support PGR students were being explored, such as workshops to raise awareness and provide resources to help with career development, and accessing support. This should help to provide this early in their student experience rather than when it is too late, to help shift culture and expectations.

An indicative vote was taken on the motion:

In favour: 10

Abstentions: 0

Against: 0

**c. Motion in Solidarity with Kashmir**

The Welfare & Rights Officer spoke in favour of this motion. The current situation in Kashmir was that Indian government had revoked legislation giving special status to Kashmir, and there had been a shutdown of movement and communications in Kashmir. Groups around the world had reacted in solidarity with this, and as a Union representing students from all around the world we should join them. Implementing

the motion would mean raising awareness, supporting student campaigns on this issue, and making a public statement on our commitment on this issue. Attendees were encouraged to look in to the issue using the resources provided in the question.

The Pembroke College GP President questioned the Council's mandate to make a political statement on a human rights issue, since the GU which is supposed to be focussed on PG students in Cambridge, and expressed concern that this might set a precedent for the GU taking issues on any number of global issues. The Welfare & Rights Officer confirmed that she would be supportive of more motions on international issues that Council believed students should be aware of. This motion would mandate actions focussed on awareness and supporting student campaigns already existing on this issue.

The Magdalene College MCR President gave his support for the actions proposed in the motion, but expressed concern about singling out the Indian government for criticism, suggesting it would be better for the motion to focus on positive support.

The Pembroke College GP President suggested that it was inappropriate for the GU to take sides on this issue and that it should instead focus on providing information so that people can make decisions themselves. The Welfare & Rights Officer cautioned that the Council should avoid false equivalence when two sides are not equal, and that on this issue the situation was sufficiently severe that she would support the Council taking a side. As a representative body the council did have a mandate to represent students on this issue.

The Magdalene College MCR VP suggested that the motion might be amended to focus on solidarity with other students, which might allow us to make that statement less explicitly political as we are simply taking a position of solidarity with groups we have a link with. The Fitzwilliam College MCR VP agreed that this was often effective.

The Murray Edwards MCR President had expressed in written comments that she believed that this issue did lie outside the charitable purpose of the GU, and agreed with suggestions that it would be better to look to the effect of the situation on the GU's members.

The Welfare & Rights Officer clarified that the intention had been to express solidarity with students, but that as there was a communications blackout in Kashmir details of the impact on students had been hard to obtain.

The GU President suggested that the motion should be amended so as to clarify geographically that not all of Kashmir is in India, as some of the region is in Pakistan and some is in China. The relevant region of India is Jammu and Kashmir, but he acknowledged talking in these terms is politically difficult as it involves an implied stance on the legitimacy of India rule over Kashmir.

It was agreed this was a healthy discussion and that it would be good to include a broader community by asking representatives to engage with their constituencies on this issue. A vote would be deferred to the next meeting of Council.

**d. Motion to Mandate the Graduate Union to Continue Working with the Cambridge University Students' Union (CUSU) on Consultation on and Development of Proposals for a New Single Union**

The motion was not taken as the meeting was inquorate.

## **8. Emergency Motions**

There were no emergency motions.

## **9. Election of the 2019-20 Council Chair**

Nominations were requested for the role of GU Council Chair. The Council agreed that filling this position was important as have a neutral chair was healthy. One nomination had been received remotely, and the council agreed to defer voting to the next meeting in order to hear from the candidates and allow time for more nominations to be sought.

## **10. Dates of Elections for the Graduate Union 2019-20**

The council received the electoral scheme for elections during the Michaelmas Term. A returning officer will be appointed by the next council on the nomination of the Executive Committee after its next meeting.

The Council approved the electoral scheme.

## **11. Call for Nominations to be co-opted by the Executive Committee**

- a. **BME Officer**
- b. **Faculty Liaison Officer**
- c. **Open Portfolio Officer**
- d. **Mature Undergraduates Officer**

Nominations were being sought to fill vacant roles on the Executive Committee. Coopted candidates would be in post until the newly elected candidates took office in January 2012. Role descriptions and information will be circulated to the Council and included in the GU bulletin.<sup>1</sup>

## **12. Dates of Upcoming Meetings**

- a. **21<sup>st</sup> October 2019, 7pm**

## **13. Any Other Business**

The UCU Grad Rep reported that UCU were looking to make progress on environmental issues with the University this term, and were preparing an open letter to the VC in advance of the climate strike calling for him to support the climate strike. It was hoped that the GU would be able to offer its support. This issue would be raised with the Executive Committee.

Workshops for MCRs and Academic Reps

- There will be a full calendar of GU-organised workshops and training for MCRs and academic reps of the next few terms, which it is hoped will be useful to council members. A timetable will be prepared and circulated over the coming weeks, which will be mixture of forums, issue based workshops and also training. Attendees were asked for topic suggestions and to help promote these events.
- The CUSU President also raised that College Forum will run fortnightly during Michaelmas term, and asked for suggestions for college-based issues that would be productive themes for meetings.

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<sup>1</sup> In a change since the meeting of Council, nominations are no longer being sought for a BME Officer. Information about available positions can be found here:  
<https://www.gradunion.cam.ac.uk/news/exec-coopt-09-19>