

Supporting Student Representatives

Report of the LTS Lunch

A panel of academic and administrative staff and student representatives (reps) discussed the various roles and support needs of student reps.

The panellists introduced themselves and their experience of working with/as student representatives:

Beth Bowers	President of the Graduate Union (GU) Former graduate representative in the Faculty of Music
Jo Harris	First year undergraduate rep on the Faculty Board of Physics and Chemistry First year undergraduate rep on the Chemistry Consultative Committee CUSU Faculty Liaison Officer
Jacob Head	Education Officer for Cambridge University Students' Union (CUSU) Student representative on the General Board Former undergraduate representative on the Faculty Board of Oriental Studies
Tamara Hug	Administrative Officer in the Department of History and Philosophy of Science (HPS) Secretary of the HPS Board, Degree Committee and Teaching Committee Responsible for recruiting student reps within HPS
Elselijn Kingma	Former PhD rep for the Department of History and Philosophy of Science
Dr Rachael Padman	University Lecturer in Physical Sciences Secretary of the Department of Physics' Teaching Committee Director of Studies in Physical Sciences at Newnham College Member of the Education Committee

One undergraduate's experience as a student representative

In settling in to her role Jo, a recently elected student rep, explained that she had found the following helpful:

- * **'mugshots'** of Faculty Board members to help identify speakers
- * **briefing sessions** with the Chair before meetings to go through the agenda
- * the opportunity to **chat** to committee members after the meeting
- * an **email list** of the students whom she represents
- * tea and biscuits and a **welcoming atmosphere** from the rest of the committee!

Following Jo's talk the panel addressed questions which had been submitted in advance.

What are the specific support needs of postgraduate students?

The President of the GU spoke about the difficulty of representing a diverse and dispersed postgraduate student body and maintaining effective lines of communication.

She outlined the following needs common to graduate students at the University:

- * a balanced structure for their studies
- * respect as mature students
- * a sense of belonging.

A number of graduate reps present discussed the importance of raising reps' profiles within their Faculty or Department so that students know who to contact and so that reps can represent their cohort effectively.

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A current email list was thought to be the most effective way for reps to communicate with their peers.

Faculties and Departments were asked to encourage their reps to make the most of the opportunities for **networking with other reps via CUSU and the GU**. The GU offered to share good practice gleaned from their experiences around the University with staff and students. It was suggested that **both** Faculties/Departments and reps should notify CUSU and/or the GU at the earliest opportunity after the elections.

How can Faculties and Departments promote continuity between reps?

Several attendees raised concerns about the lack of continuity between incoming and outgoing reps. Faculties and Departments were encouraged to facilitate a **hand-over meeting** between incoming and outgoing reps to help ensure that knowledge is transferred rather than lost. Those present agreed that a hand-over could form a useful part of incoming reps' induction.

Where a physical handover is not possible (i.e. for MPhil reps who have already left the University) students could be asked to keep a **log of their rep-related activities** and **folder of useful resources** which could be passed onto the new rep. After the first year reps would only need to check for currency and amend where appropriate.

HPS ask their reps to update a **section in their course handbooks about the role of student representative**. This is a useful resource for those considering standing as a representative and for incoming reps.

What is the University's guidance about election timings for Faculty Board reps?

The General Board expect Faculties and Departments to hold their elections for Faculty Board reps at a set time in November. Deviating from this time makes it difficult for CUSU to time their publicity drive effectively and could damage participation rates, but it was noted that there could be good reasons for doing so.

It was suggested that Faculties and Departments could avoid the problem of students being temporarily un-represented (i.e. if a graduate rep on a nine month MPhil course leaves the University before the elections in November) by electing a rep for each course rather than just one for the undergraduate or postgraduate cohort. This is only possible for locally-controlled committees or groups: Faculty Boards have rigidly-specified memberships. HPS have found that this system works well and ensures that each course is represented for its duration.



How can Faculties and Departments increase participation in elections for Faculty Board reps?

Many Faculties and Departments find recruiting reps for Faculty Boards particularly challenging. Several of the reps present explained that, unlike the self-evident roles of course reps on SSLCs, students are often confused about what the role of Faculty Board rep entails. It was suggested that participation might be increased through greater clarity, i.e. by circulating a **'job description'** to explain:

- * **what is involved** in acting as a Faculty Board rep
- * **how much time** students should be prepared to commit to the role
- * what previous reps have **achieved**.

HPS have found that explaining the role of representatives early in the year, including information about the role in their handbooks and then **emailing regular reminders about elections** has helped to increase participation.

HPS have also found that **allowing students to make nominations and vote by email** received a good response from students. Those present looked forward to the introduction of an online voting system which could increase participation.

Encouraging academics to promote the role of representative was also recommended as a way of increasing participation. Various Faculties and Departments **ask staff to mention elections and the importance of student reps during lectures**. In Physics and Chemistry allowing students to **deliver their manifestos** for standing on consultative committees **during lectures** has been very well received by students.

LTS Forum

For more information about supporting student reps join the LTS Forum via <https://camtools.caret.cam.ac.uk/portal/>

Is your Faculty or Department making the most of student representation on its committees?

CUSU's Education Officer pointed out that student representation is not limited to student issues and that students should be able to sit on all decision-making committees. It is General Board policy that student representatives should be full members of the committees on which they sit and should be fully engaged in the committee's work.

Concerns were raised that, on occasion, items have been inappropriately placed on the reserved agenda, and that student reps could therefore be unaware of important issues which would affect them and their peers. Clearer guidance to help Faculties and Departments determine what should be reserved would be helpful, and was being considered.

What are the benefits of introducing a Staff Student Liaison Committee (SSLC)?

The panel agreed that SSLCs can be a **useful forum for discussion** of those student issues which do not fit the stricter remit of Faculty Boards. SSLCs deal with concerns at a local level and feed into other committees where appropriate. This can reduce the frustration of reps whose queries are redirected as they are not considered suitable for more formal committees.

Another benefit is that more students can sit on an SSLC than on a Faculty Board. For example, there is a rep for every course on HPS' SSLC. Reps who had experience of SSLCs or consultative committees spoke of a friendly and informal atmosphere where their concerns and ideas were taken seriously.

What other practical measures could help Faculties/Departments to support their reps?

The panel agreed that small practical measures can make a big difference to reps' ability to fulfil their roles

effectively. A **current email list of students**, to enable reps to contact their entire cohort, was deemed particularly important, with **access to photocopiers and storage space for papers** also helpful.

Some Faculties and Departments offer administrative support to reps; this could include **help collating questionnaire responses, producing newsletters, or creating and maintaining webpages**. The panel recommended providing some, or all, of the following to help raise the profile of reps amongst their cohort:

- * **a generic email address**
e.g. rep@faculty.cam.ac.uk so that staff, the Unions, and students don't need to remember reps' names (and that continuity between reps is maintained)
- * **webspace** on the Faculty or Department's website for contact and campaign details
- * **a pigeon-hole** in the main office
- * **a noticeboard**
- * **time in lectures** to make announcements.

How else can Faculties and Departments help to engage students?

'Closing the loop', by informing students of actions carried out in response to their feedback, was felt to be very helpful in motivating reps and engaging students. In HPS feedback from reps has led to changes in courses, supervision times and course work deadlines; seeing that reps can make a real difference has encouraged other students to get involved.

Some Faculties and Departments offer **incentives** to encourage reps to engage with their role. For example, students on the Physics Consultative Committee receive £30 in book vouchers if they attend every meeting. Furthermore, HPS bought pizza for those who participated in a PhD feedback session.

The Reserved Agenda

Items relating to the employment, promotion, admission or academic assessment of named individuals are normally placed on the reserved agenda. Although the Chair may declare any item of business reserved, this clause is intended to add flexibility for exceptional cases, not as a means of privately discussing sensitive issues in which students have an interest. Chairs are encouraged not to define areas of reserved business beyond those required by Statutes and Ordinances.

To promote a good working relationship with student reps some Faculties and Departments give the reserved agenda to their reps so that they are aware of what it contains without compromising confidentiality, or put reserved items on the unreserved agenda for general discussion which is then continued in reserved business.

The statutory definition of reserved business (Statute C, IV, 13 and Statute K, 20) can be found online at: <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/education/learning/junior.html#appendix2>

NB. From 2006-7 HEFCE recommend that External Examiners' reports should be included on the unreserved agenda as it is important that students have access to them and summaries will no longer be published on either the TQI or CamDATA websites. The reports may be abridged where necessary to maintain confidentiality on sensitive issues or on matters which might identify individual candidates.

The Student Voice

GU Support for Student Representatives

The University of Cambridge Graduate Union (GU) provides assistance for graduate student representatives on various academic and welfare-related matters. The role of the GU in this respect can be stated as follows:

1. Support and Advice
2. Information and Access
3. Representation and Accountability

First, the GU supports student representatives by providing advice on their initiatives aimed at improving students' conditions across the University. Furthermore, the GU assists representatives with conducting student surveys on topics relevant within their Faculties as well as with organising intra-departmental academic and social events, which facilitate the interaction between student representatives in order that they may share examples of good practice in accordance with the GU constitution.

Second, the GU enables student representatives to have networking access for support and informational purposes. The GU directly interacts with student representatives and deals with their queries via their automatic membership on the GU Council and through

a weekly e-bulletin and online forum. At Council meetings, members exchange information about current issues, available opportunities and upcoming events, which are then disseminated throughout the graduate community. Graduate issues raised by student representatives are promoted via representation on University committees, including the Board of Graduate Studies, and thus inform representatives about academic developments (e.g. transferable skills).

Lastly, the GU provides guidance as to how to best serve as a student representative and bring benefit to students. The GU is a useful and helpful resource for student representatives in terms of offering direct support, access to the student community and liaison opportunities with University bodies. Upon request, the GU organises Faculty Representative Forums to solicit student feedback on the School level, for instance. This level of interaction between representatives and their Faculties further strengthens student representation, increases the level of communication and enhances Faculties' support of their graduate students. The GU welcomes suggestions and feedback; queries should be directed to Esuna Dugarova (ed300), who currently serves as the Faculty Representative on the GU Board.

Esuna Dugarova, GU Faculty Representative

CUSU's Training for Student Representatives

What is committee etiquette?

How do you present a paper?

What do you do if your Faculty tries to suspend your Tripos?

With a view to assisting Student Faculty Board members, CUSU organises a variety of training sessions, and the Education, Faculty Liaison and Academic Affairs Officers are always available for them to contact for support and information.

Last term saw three training sessions which covered committee skills, presenting a paper, CamTools and more thorny issues such as the University structure. Students were particularly interested in hearing about how Faculties should support student representatives, as expressed in the University's Quality Assurance Guidelines.

Problematic however has been a relatively low turn out of student reps at the sessions, which is not only due to their busy exam term schedules. After the Faculty Elections in December only 12 Faculties communicated the results to CUSU, thus making it impossible for CUSU to email notice of the training sessions to all student Faculty Board members.

Our training sessions were only made possible by the support given from members of the Education Section, CARET, and the Senior Tutors Education Committee, who have assisted CUSU over the years and continue to willingly give up their time and share their expertise.

Student members of Faculties are very valuable in providing that essential link between decision-making and the people who are affected by the decisions. To assist the input of student representatives it is hoped that faculties support CUSU training sessions; encouraging students to attend, and facilitating easy communication between CUSU and the students.

Patrick Leonard, CUSU Academic Affairs Officer

Student Representation on Central University Committees

In addition to Faculty Boards and SSLCs students are represented on many high-level University Committees. Methods of appointing student representatives vary from University-run elections which are open to all students (e.g. Council) to others for which the Students' Union Presidents and/or other sabbatical officers automatically become the representative (e.g. the General Board's Education Committee).

Examples of student representation on central committees

Council: <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/committee/council/>

Remit Council is the main executive and policy-making body with overall responsibility for the administration of the University.

Rep(s) Three reps sit on Council, as least one of whom must be a postgraduate student. University-wide elections are held during Easter term and students serve in their personal capacity even if they are also CUSU or GU officers.

General Board of the Faculties: <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/committee/gb/>

Remit The General Board is the body responsible for the academic and educational policy of the University.

Rep(s) Two students, one undergraduate and one postgraduate, are elected by a centrally organised cross-campus election in Easter Term.

Senior Tutors' Committee and its Standing Committees: <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/committee/seniortutors/>

Remit This intercollegiate body is concerned with educational policy, welfare issues and student numbers.

Rep(s) Student reps are nominated by CUSU/GU to sit on the standing committees.

Joint Advisory Committee on Student Matters

Remit This joint committee of the Council and the General Board provides a central forum for discussion between senior and junior members.

Rep(s) Student representation on the Committee includes: the three elected student members on Council; CUSU's President and sabbatical officers; and the President and Deputy President of the GU.

Board of Graduate Studies: <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/gradstud/>

Remit The Board's responsibilities include the admission of Graduate Students, supervision of their work, and the award of most qualifications. The Board reports annually to the Council.

Rep(s) The President of the Graduate Union (GU).

The General Board's Education Committee: <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/education/>

Remit The Education Committee meets fortnightly during term to discuss issues relating to teaching, learning and assessment. The Committee reports to the General Board.

Rep(s) CUSU's Academic Affairs Officer

CUSU/GU representation on University committees

Representatives from CUSU and the GU sit on many University bodies, their webpages give further details.

For CUSU representation at University level see: <http://www.cusu.cam.ac.uk/union/university/>

For GU representation at University level see: <http://www.gradunion.cam.ac.uk/representation/committees/>

Plagiarism Awareness Day: Wednesday 2 May 2007

The University will hold a Plagiarism Awareness Day on Wednesday 2 May which will feature the following events:

1. **Plagiarism awareness event for postgraduate students in the humanities (1030: LG17, Faculty of Law)**
To be led by Dr Laurie Friday, Secretary of the Board of Graduate Studies.
2. **Demonstration for staff on using Turnitin to detect plagiarism (1400-1515: LG17, Faculty of Law)**
To include a brief explanation of how CamTOOLS interfaces with Turnitin and a Q&A session with a panel of representatives from Turnitin and CARET as well as colleagues with experience of using CamTOOLS.
3. **Plagiarism awareness event for postgraduate students in the sciences (1700: Graduate Union Building)**
To be led by Dr Laurie Friday, Secretary of the Board of Graduate Studies.

A plagiarism awareness website has been launched which provides a central portal for University guidance, links to Faculty/Department statements on plagiarism, lists of FAQs and associated resources. Students and staff are encouraged to visit the site at <http://www.cam.ac.uk/plagiarism/>

The plagiarism awareness initiative is managed by the Board of Examinations in collaboration with the Board of Graduate Studies, CUSU and the GU.

External LTS-Related Event**Conference on Developing an Inclusive Curriculum: 7 September 2007, University of York**

The HEA will hold a second annual conference on Developing an Inclusive Curriculum at the University of York on 7 September 2007.

This year the conference will include the subject centres for Psychology, English, History, Classics and Archaeology, Philosophy and Religious Studies, and Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences Subject Centre (GEES).

'Equality' and 'diversity' are terms which are increasingly used in higher education, and often in relation to the curriculum. However, much work in this context does not deal specifically with curriculum content and delivery. This conference will offer delegates from different discipline areas a space to share or develop practical approaches to the embedding of equality and diversity in curricula for the

enhancement of the student learning experience. Participants will consider ways in which the many aspects of diversity - including age, class, gender, sexual orientation, culture, religious belief, ethnicity and disability - can become part of their critical thinking in the development of curriculum content and delivery methods.

The day will include a generic strand in the morning and disciplinary strands in the afternoon, and will use a range of approaches to stimulate discussion and reflection. There will also be an opportunity to learn about relevant projects and resources.

For more information and to book your place, visit the event page on the Academy website at:

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/events/List_5476.htm

**Next LTS Lunch . . .**

The next LTS Lunch on **Monday 9 July 2007** will focus on training courses for postgraduates.

Further details will be posted nearer the time on the LTS Forum and the Education Section website: <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/education/lts/lunch/>

LTS News

The July edition will focus on interacting with PSRBs. Comments or suggestions for future editions are very welcome. We are also happy to include adverts for LTS related activities i.e. conferences, workshops or projects. Please contact Madeline McKerchar at the Education Section, Academic Division, 4 Parson's Court.

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www: <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/education/lts/>