

REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP PROVIDING INPUT INTO THE NEW DRAFT GRADUATE UNION CONSTITUTION JUNE 2016

Introduction

This is the report of a working group consisting of Alice Hutchings (PdOC Committee member), Adina Feldman (PdOC President), Stephen Kell (PdOC Social and Networking Events Officer), Paul Coxon (PdOC Vice-President), and Chad Allen (President of the Graduate Union). The working group met on 6 June 2016 to consider the following questions posed by Chad Allen with respect to how postdocs are included within the Graduate Union Constitution:

- Should postdocs in or out of the Regent House have different rights;
- Whether membership should be opt-in or opt-out;
- Whether postdocs should have specific reserved voting/non-voting representation at the GU Council, and if so, how many representatives there should be;
- Whether there should be specific representation on the GU Executive Committee;
- How far the relationship ought to be reciprocated.

Background

The current Graduate Union (GU) constitution has three tiers of membership:

- Members
- Non-graduate members
- Associates

Included under 'non-graduate members', under a further category called 'Adjoined students', some postdocs are included using the following limited definition:

Post-doctoral researchers working within the University and who are members of the University

The rights provided to adjoined students include participating in GU activities, standing for and voting in part-time officer elections, being a voting or non-voting member of the GU Council (if they hold a qualifying position), and attending and speaking at the GU Council and general meetings.

However, according to the University of Cambridge Statutes, postdocs who did not study at the university, and who are not members of the Regent House are not considered 'Members of the University'. Such postdocs (the majority), as well as research assistants, would be included in the Constitution under the 'Associates' category:

Graduate research workers who are neither registered graduate students nor members of the Regent House

Associates can participate in GU activities, be appointed by the GU Council to be one of four non-voting representatives of the Associates at the Council, and enjoy any other benefits the GU Council decides.

The GU is currently considering amending their constitution, and their President sought input from the PdOC Society into how postdocs should be included in the future.

The Working Group

The option to participate in the working group was available to all members of the PdOC Society Committee, and an invitation was issued to (and accepted by) Chad Allen. The working group met once (with Paul Coxon sending his apologies), and a draft of this report was circulated to its members for corrections and approval. This report provides an overview of the discussion and deliberation that was had, and provides recommendations for consideration by the PdOC Society Committee.

Inclusion of postdocs in the GU constitution

It is the position of the working group that postdocs require representation within the University, but the GU is not the right body for this. There are three main reasons for this:

- Postdocs have different needs to graduate students;
- It is the position of the PdOC Society that all postdocs should be members of the Regent House, rather than being perceived as being represented by the GU; and
- The GU should be focusing on their main constituency.

The working group recommends that the PdOC Society supports an amendment of the GU constitution where postdocs that are members of the University are omitted as 'non-graduate

members', however, as there is some overlap between the needs of the two groups, they be retained as 'associates' within the GU constitution. This would also remove the inconsistent rights for postdocs who are members of the Regent House, and those that are not. As associate members, postdocs cannot vote, are not represented, but can attend GU events. Most postdocs at present would be considered associates of the GU.

The working group recommends that the PdOC Society supports an amendment of the GU constitution where the relevant definition under 'associates' be changed to read 'All research staff associated or affiliated with the University of Cambridge, its colleges, or University Partner Institutions'. This would make it clear that it included research assistant staff, as well as all postdoctoral researchers.

It was noted that the PdOC Society constitution (section 3(e)) already includes and allows graduate students that share the interests of the Society to participate in its activities.

A PdOC Society and Graduate Union Trustees Joint Subcommittee

The working group also recommends that a PdOC Society and GU Trustees joint subcommittee be established. This subcommittee should meet quarterly, ideally before the beginning of each term. This joint subcommittee should be made up of:

- PdOC President, Vice-President, and a representative from the PdOC events subcommittee
- GU President, Vice-President, and an events representative

The chair and secretary should be rotated between the GU and PdOC Presidents at every meeting. The purpose of the subcommittee will be to further the relationship between the two bodies, particularly if the reciprocal nature of the two constitutions were to be better realised. It was recognised that there was scope for better integration across activities and events (where funding permits). Particularly, social events involving families and out-of-term activities were identified as priority areas where the two bodies could better complement each other.

Implementing change

The working group recommends that the PdOC Society should hold an EGM to approve a position response to support the GU's amendment, if the recommendations laid out above are adopted. It was noted that an EGM is already being prepared to discuss a PdOC Code of Conduct. The suggested wording of the position response is:

The PdOC Society acknowledges that although we have common interests, the Graduate Union is not the ideal body to represent postdocs. It is the position of the PdOC Society that all research staff should have equal rights, regardless of whether they are currently members of the Regent House. Thus, we welcome an amendment to the current wording of the constitution which includes some research staff as "non-graduate members" and some as

“associates” based on Regent House membership. The PdOC Society supports the proposed amendments to the Schedule on Membership in the Graduate Union constitution.

Furthermore, we have together agreed to establish a Graduate Union and Postdoc Society joint subcommittee, which will meet quarterly.

Suggested future steps

July 2016	PdOC Society Committee to receive the report, discuss the implications and approve the recommendations (subject to change)
July 2016	PdOC Society Committee to respond to the Graduate Union informing the outcome of the July meeting
2016	If the Graduate Union were agreeable to the views laid out in this report, then the PdOC Society should hold an EGM to approve the position response before the GU constitution is sent for approval to the University Council

Conclusion

The working group decided that the preference would be for postdocs to have equal rights under the GU constitution, regardless of whether they are currently members of the Regent House. Membership should be at the ‘associate’ level, and should be opt-out. This would create a reciprocal relationship with the GU and the PdOC Society. As associates, postdocs do not have voting rights or representation at the GU Council.

It is recommended that a joint subcommittee be established to further the relationship between the Graduate Union and the PdOC Society, particularly relating to the inclusion of each others constituencies to participate in each others’ activities and events, where funding permits.