

## Graduates need to be less complacent and become more political

The opening lines of the Graduate Studies Prospectus for 2005-2006 remind us that “...over 40% of the student population are graduate students, so at Cambridge, graduates are anything but invisible...”. Invisible, no. But struggling. Struggling for an identity. Struggling for support. Struggling for equality. And the list goes on. Most of us face similar issues and only whine about them informally at socials or over coffee. Few of us realise how significant the Middle Combination Rooms and Graduate Union can be at representing graduate students and working to solve their issues.

Varsity (15 October 2004) and TCS (14 October 2004) recently headlined the failures of the Graduate Union (GU), and both papers point to a passive graduate student community. In October 2003, when the GU launched its first ever ents programme with Ecclesia, which attracted over 500 graduate students (a first for the graduate community), the papers did not report the event, but focussed instead on the failures of CUSU Ents. One year ahead and the GU is under intense scrutiny for mismanagement. The new President, Mr Ribu Polachirackal-Tharakan faces a vote of non-confidence from his committee as this magazine goes to press. He is heavily criticised by his committee and several MCRs for lack of leadership, poor representation of graduates, and inactivity. His reply focuses on the difficulty in understanding what graduate students want from the GU. Both Varsity and TCS present a case for integrating the GU into CUSU, and compare the excellent organisational structure of CUSU to the lack of organisation of the GU. CUSU has 6 sabbatical officers and a couple of permanent staff ; the GU has one sabbatical officer, a part-time finance officer, and a vacant position for an office administrator. Can the GU be expected to work as efficiently as CUSU under such conditions?

Vague comparisons between the GU and CUSU are not as evident as we are led to believe. There are fundamental differences between graduate and undergraduate issues at Cambridge which justify the need for an independent Union to represent graduate students. Graduates students can be on one-, two-, or three- year courses, while undergraduates are at Cambridge for a standard three to four years. Graduates study on full- or part-time courses while undergrads study full-time. This diversity in status and courses, in addition to the issues of accommodation and finance faced by most, present a case for a graduate union. While graduate life revolves mainly around departments, welfare issues such as accommodation matters and often finance can only be solved at University or College-level. TCS (14 October 2004) quotes a Darwin graduate, Mr Ben Lishman, as saying that “mostly our gripes would be taken up directly with our supervisors or departments: I can’t see how much the GU could possibly do for me...”. Does Mr Lishman represent the average graduate student? Do we all have departments and supervisors who can provide us with the funding required for conferences? Can our supervisors or departments help us when we have difficulties finding accommodation, or deal with welfare and minority issues which the graduate community faces as a group? Graduates must become less complacent and realise that we all face similar issues and the only way to have them solved is to adopt the undergraduate approach: use your Union, become more aware of what is discussed around the University and militate for a better life for graduates.

Our team brings you GOWN. It is a termly magazine for graduates and by graduates. In this first issue, our cover story traces up the origins of postgraduate work in Cambridge and highlights the current diversity of our graduate community. We have aimed for a range of articles that will hopefully appeal to the variety of interests of fellow graduates. From an update of a field trip in India, to the pubs of Mill Road, we investigate the various aspects of graduate life. Do let us know what you think: we can only be as good as you want us to be.

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