

A note by the Deputy President (Graduate Students)
for Council March 13th 2007

Re-structuring the DPGS role

Over the past couple of weeks, I have been developing different models for the DPGS and the GSA for next year. I have been in discussion with some of my reps and some feedback has gone into producing the final three models. I have also visited Bristol and Cardiff to see their structures as both have specific postgraduate structures in place. As will be outlined below, Bristol employs a model that is closest to Model 3 and it seems to be working very well. The students are not being undermined by the staff member and there is plenty of work for the staff member to be doing as they keep tabs on PG issues through out the years. Cardiff on the other hand have a Grad Centre that doesn't seem to be working very well at all, and our representation system outshines them by far.

I would just like to give you a summary of the three new models so you are kept in the loop. There is plenty more discussion to be done and a student forum, recommendations from RWB etc before I present this to Council in a full form. The student forum is to take place either on Monday 19th or Tuesday 20th March so please come along and air your views as well. Please bear in mind that the Finances have been worked out for all three models and none fare worse than the other:

Model #1: Full time sabbatical GSA President

This model is the least radical and attempts to build on the successes of a full time Graduate Students sabbatical position.

Under this model

1. The DPGS position would remain but lose its Deputy President status and be known as GSA Chair.
2. The GSA Chair would work full-time and enjoy a similar status to other non-Central Union sabbatical officers such as the Medic President.
3. In recognising that the role of the GSA Chair is still likely to be held by a recent Masters graduate, it is proposed that a GSA Vice-Chair is established that could only be occupied by PhD students. This arrangement is more amenable to PhD students' routines and it is hoped that this will ensure that PhD students are adequately represented at higher levels of the GSA and College.
4. Despite elections being held in summer term, this part-time Vice-chair would start in the summer and the GSA chair will start in September. Therefore they can bring the chair up to speed with any handover and team dynamics. If funds permit, a nominal honorarium could be paid to the holder of this position over the summer as is paid to the C&G president.
5. All other posts and structures within the GSA would remain unchanged.

Model #2: Part time paid officers

This model effectively splits the responsibility of the DPGS into three part time paid positions. Under this model

1. The DPGS position would be abolished and replaced with GSA Chair
2. The GSA Chair would become a part time paid role that any PhD or Masters student would be able to hold during their studies.
3. The GSA Chair would be supported by two Vice Chairs, one for Taught PG students and the other for research student, who would also be paid at a slightly lower rate. These Vice Chairs would take on a lot of the committee work that is currently undertaken by the DPGS.

4. Technically the paid officers would be salaried for a nominal six hour week to satisfy College regulations, but it is accepted that they may need to put more hours in at times.
5. The treasurer, activities co-ordinator, welfare officer and secretary would remain as unpaid volunteer positions.
6. Funds released by the abolition of a full time sabbatical role could be reassigned to:
 - a. An increased activities budget
 - b. A contribution towards a staff member to support the GSA.
7. Elections for the Taught Vice Chair would take place in the autumn term of the year they start i.e. October as soon as they come to College and elections for the Chair and Research Vice Chair would be held in the summer term, so they will start immediately.

Model #3: Volunteer officers with full staff support

This model attempts to tackle the political disquiet that “paying volunteers” may generate by transferring the DPGS salary to a staff member, rather than paid volunteers. This model has been developed by Bristol University Student Union and a delegation from ICU plans to visit Bristol in March.

Under this model:

1. The DPGS position would be abolished and replaced with an unpaid volunteer GSA Chair.
2. The GSA Chair could be supported by six Vice Chairs who would take on a lot of the committee work that is currently undertaken by the DPGS. However, unlike model two, these officers would not be paid.
3. All elections save the Activities Vice-Chair would take place in the autumn term with duties being upheld immediately with corresponding handover occurring. It seems inevitable that the Activities Vice-Chair would most probably be a PhD student. This is unavoidable as most MScs will be far too busy writing up theses in the summer will have left the college before the October elections are held. All other positions could be held by any postgraduate student.
4. The funds released by the abolition of the DPGS role would be used to employ a full time member of support staff.
5. This staff member would perform a support and administration role and facilitate communication between the volunteer unpaid GSA officers. They would also offer general support for Events and work to ensure that handovers are successful and training for new officers is delivered.
6. This Staff member could double as a “Representation” staff where they would be responsible for ensuring that all representative positions are elected as this is a major drawback of the Union. This would encourage greater and more enthusiastic involvement with the Union. Representation is especially hard for graduate students (e.g. the Faculty of Medicine is spread over five campuses), so the staff member would still be primarily working for the GSA. However, as a secondary role, they would also be assisting Faculty Unions in both their work for postgraduates and representation as a whole.
7. This new staff member would complement and support the work of the DPEW, Faculty Union Presidents and GSA Chair in a way that other student services staff support the work of CSC and club officers.
8. This Staff member could be held to account through conventional performance management rather than through debate in Union Council or student media.
9. The GSA activities budget could be increased but to a lesser extent than in model two (see appendix for precise amounts).

Model 4: Status Quo

It could be argued that there have been no major shortcomings with the actual outputs of the GSA under the current system and it seems appropriate that a “status quo” option should be presented alongside these other models. This model stems from the argument that the GSA is working well and can only improve. However, this does not address the timing of election concerns.

GSA “Chill at the Hill” event at Notting Hill Arts Club

This was an event that was done with a lot of close participation of all the reps and the Tanaka PG social reps in particular. It involved the intensive week-long physical pre-sale of tickets by reps and myself in departments throughout the day and during lunch times at the SCR. This method was very well-received as it increased the visibility of the GSA to no end and the evening itself was very well received with 179 pre-sold tickets and a further 20 students from Imperial arriving on the night (we did not receive revenue for these latter).

The club were very happy with us and they had cut a deal to do happy hour all night and discounted entry all night for our students specifically on a Friday night and we hope to go back there next term. We have made a slight income from this.

We are now arranging the next party for the end of term.

Buddy Scheme

I have written and submitted a proposal with three options of funding the Buddy Scheme for PhD students to Bernie Morley-Director of GSLM. He has returned it to me with some modifications and I have to contact a number of Departmental Director of Studies to get more accurate logistics of administration.

Merit Award

There was a 21% return on the survey and when this was submitted to the Graduate School Management Committee Meetings, it was suggested that they would prefer about a 40% turnout. With that thought in mind, I have re-sent the email and also concentrated on the Centre for Environmental Policy and Tanaka MSc students via reps and course administrators as these were the large cohorts of students yet to fill in the survey. On last count, numbers had gone to approximately 25%

GSA Newsletter, University Challenge, Volunteering, PG Careers Fair, Alumni events

I have managed to secure some funding for a physical GSA Newsletter for next term and am currently thinking of content. We have also secured some funding to partly fund a PG Careers fair and alumni events. We are currently contacting companies for the PG Careers Fair, alumni and inspirational speakers. In addition, we have been sending out regular GSA newsletters by email. The last one included discounts for PGs for International Night after party, arranging a team for University Challenge and discount memberships for PG students due to a non-paid affiliation with the Chartered Management Institute. In addition, I have advertised a course happening in the Imperial Volunteer Centre and am considering how to get more PGs aware of Imperial Innovations.