



# Annual Report

2014 / 2015



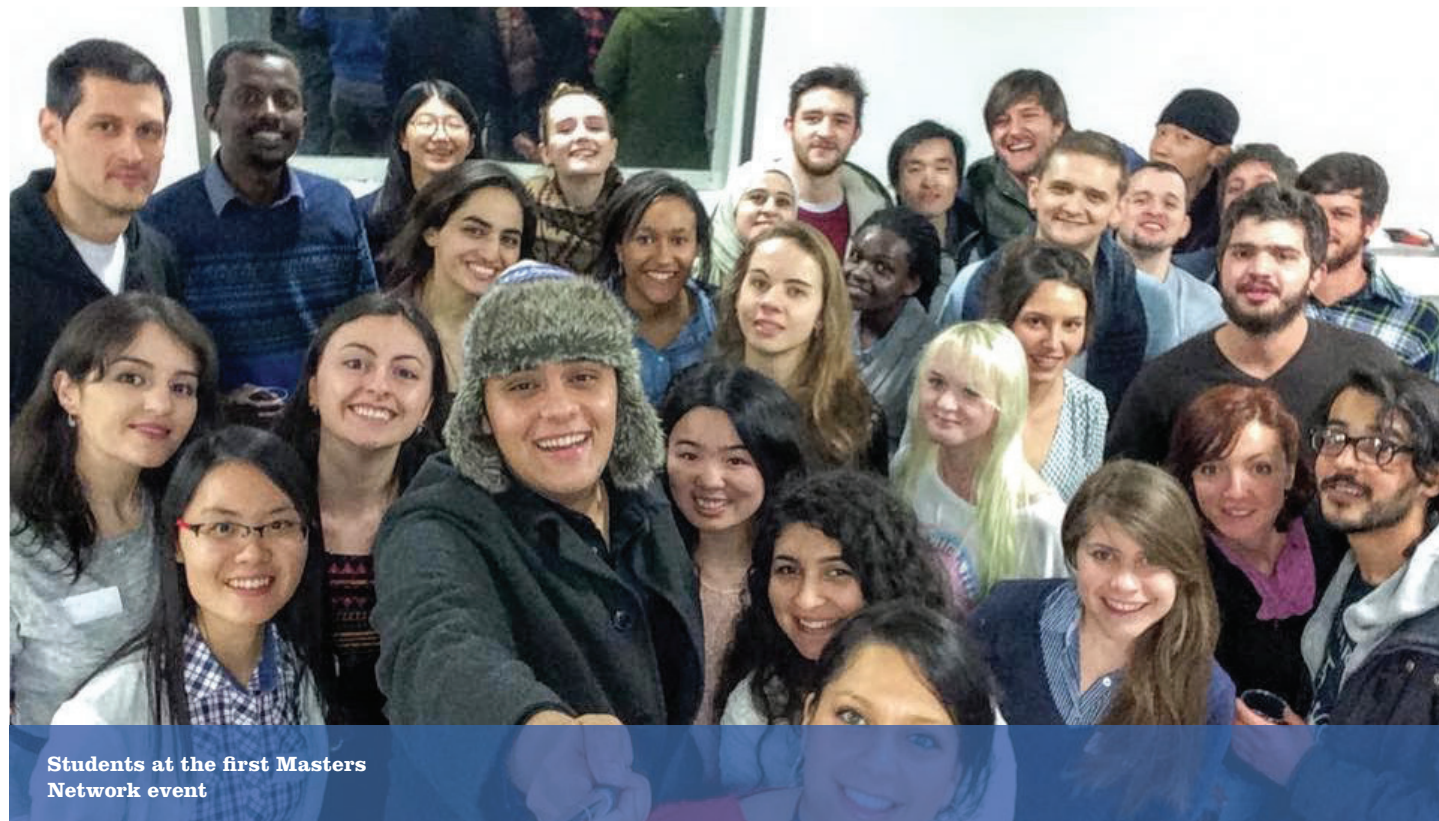




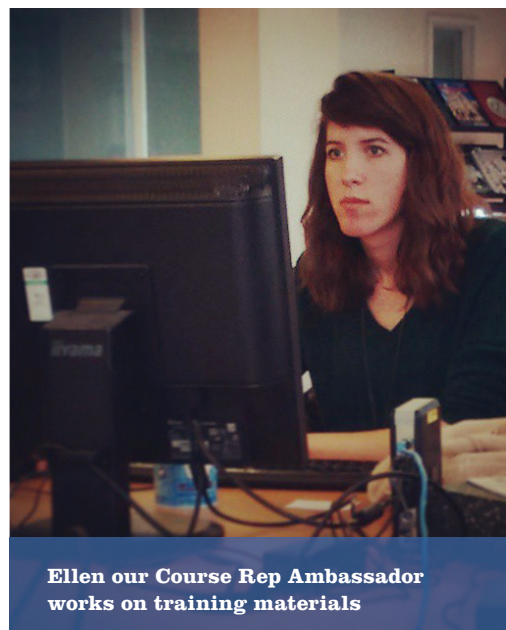
**Volunteers at our Take A Break Session in the Library**



**A student performs during an Open Mic Night**



**Students at the first Masters Network event**

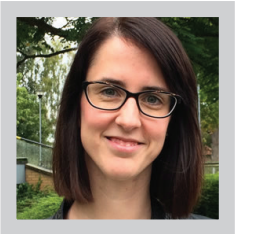


**Ellen our Course Rep Ambassador works on training materials**



**Officers and Ambassadors host a BBQ**

# Letter from the President



Looking back over the past year, I can say that being the GSA President has enabled me to discover a whole new side of the University - how it is run and what students need from it. I have learned that student representatives really do have a powerful voice that they can, and have a responsibility to, use wisely and to make sure that the University are aware of students' experiences and needs. In the past year, I have worked very hard on ensuring that the voices of postgraduates students are heard, and to give the GSA a reputation as a representative body that students can always turn to for advice but also to act as an intermediary on their behalf with, for example, departments.

Also, I was very excited at the creation of the Graduate Research School, not only as the GSA President but also as a PhD student at this University. In particular, it was an honour and a great experience to have been invited to be on the panel that chose Professor Tom Stoneham as its Dean, and to have been involved in the set up of the School every step of the way.

Another major focus of my presidency has been mental health. The GSA has from the start been extremely supportive of my endeavours and has guided me in setting up a student-led mental health campaign called Mind Your Head. The GSA has the capacity and the expertise to support postgraduate students in their endeavours not only to complete their degrees but also to get the best possible experience while studying at York.

The future holds many exciting directions for the GSA, but I personally believe that the GSA needs to continue putting all its efforts in ensuring greater postgraduate involvement in the elections in order to ensure quality representation and a strong voice for all postgraduate students.

**Jelena Horvatić**  
**GSA President 2014-15**



# August/September

## August

For the GSA, the 2014/15 academic year started as it meant to go on. Traditionally the summer holidays are relatively quiet times for student organisations. However, our unique position at the heart of postgraduate life means that we try and do everything we can for the large number of postgraduates here busy finishing their dissertations or undertaking their vivas.

To encourage postgraduates to socialise with each other and relax a little during this stressful time, we ran ‘Take a Break’ sessions in the library where we gave out information on our free sports sessions and offered 100 free coffees at the Library Café.

We also took over responsibility for the pre-sessional postgraduate student social programme and worked closely with the Centre for English Language Teaching (CELT) and Student Support Services to ensure that future international students at the university had opportunities to socialise, practice their English and be introduced to York and the United Kingdom.

We were also extremely busy with planning for postgraduate welcome week and engaging on social media with incoming students – answering their questions and providing them space online to meet and chat to other new postgraduates.

“  
**We ran or helped to run 67 separate postgraduate Welcome Week events.**

## September

September was a particularly significant month for the GSA as - following the changes to our representational structure in 2013/14 - our first ever full time President – Jelena Horvatic – started her year in office. Ling Ding – our first Vice-President for Postgraduate Engagement also took up her position.

In early September - in collaboration with the university’s Accommodation Services - we ran our annual Find a Housemate Event for postgraduates looking for private sector accommodation. We ran a couple of social events for people to get to know one another before they committed to moving into a house share. Accommodation Services and Student Support Services were on hand to advise on contracts and where to search for good quality houses. Thanks to a summer internship project with Higher York we produced information sheets on key areas around York with important information on travel times, amenities and typical rent prices.

For the GSA, September means Welcome Week. This year in partnership with Student Support Services and other services and groups throughout the university – we ran or participated in 67 separate Welcome Week events from social events like Quiz, Karaoke, Open Mic and Jazz Nights and a free trip to Knaresborough and Harrogate - to more formal introductions to postgraduate support services. Welcome Week also marked the relaunch of our Family, LGBTQ and PhD Networks. We had excellent turnouts at all of the networks’ inaugural events which led to stronger networks and us to consider how we can support them further in the future.

# October

## October

Starting in October, but continuing throughout the year, the GSA President and Vice-Presidents represented postgraduate students at all major university committees, including: Council; Senate; Court; University Teaching Committee; Standing Committee on Assessment; Coordinating Group for Supplementary Programmes, Student Experience Committee; Student First; Equality and Diversity Committee; Health, Safety and Welfare Committee; Campus Development Steering Group; Policy and Resources Committee; and Hull York Medical School Joint Senate Committee.

In addition, the President has been involved in a number of working groups related to planning for a new teaching building, the creation of the York Graduate Research School, and the future International Pathway College.

The GSA has also continued to strengthen its links with the City of York Council and other academic institutions across the city, through Higher York and attendance at regular Student Community Partnership meetings.

For the first time we ran our course representative training jointly with YUSU training over 80 postgraduate course reps. Our relationship with course representative was enhanced in 2014/15 with the creation of a new Course Representative Ambassador staff position.

The GSA President created a number of small group sessions under the umbrella of ‘Café Research’. The idea was to encourage research students to get together to talk about common experiences and issues they may be experiencing facilitated by other support services at the university, such as the Open Door Team. We also ran a Speed Debating event giving postgraduates a further opportunity to flex their debating muscles with new people in a friendly setting.

For the first time we ran a Re-Welcome Night, giving postgraduates who missed all or part of Welcome Week an opportunity to get together to get acquainted with one another and some of the things that the GSA and the university has to offer.

We also relaunched our Postgraduate Community Fund. In previous years anyone submitting a bid did so via a written submission that was scrutinised by a panel. In 2014/15 we changed the bidding process so that bidders had to pitch their ideas to the panel in person. This meant the panel were able to ask questions and better tailor support to successful bids as well as give immediate feedback to unsuccessful bids.

We also ran trips to Leeds and Liverpool – taking approximately 100 students shopping in Leeds and 50 on a day trip to Liverpool.

Finally, October wouldn’t be complete without a Halloween party, which we held in the Edge, Wentworth College.

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**We helped train over 80 postgraduate course representatives and provided four face-to-face problem-solving sessions with them during the year.**

# November/December

## November

November was dominated by our autumn term elections. For the first time the postgraduate population were voting to elect a Vice-President Social Activities and a Vice-President Community as well as Council Members and a student trustee.

**Vice-President (Postgraduate Student Activities)**  
WINNER: Amal Fadil

**Vice-President (Postgraduate Community)**  
WINNER: Alberto Luque Martinez

**Council Members**  
Kelvin Elphick (*Chair*)  
Chen Qi  
Qingyang Sun  
Xiaoxin Li  
Fang Guo  
Siu Oi Ki (*Kitty*)  
Man Jiang  
Yiliang Chen  
Zhimin Lin

**Student Trustees**  
Urban Jaksa  
Lijuan Xie

For the first time we had a full officer team under the new representational structure as well as a GSA Council to hold the officer team to account.

Our President gave a presentation to the University’s Court on the GSA’s activities in the 2013/14 year as well as our officer’s plans for the year ahead.

We also organised a karaoke night and a festive trip to Manchester’s Christmas Market.

## December

The GSA had a particularly busy December. We worked with Student Support Services to put in place a Hosting Scheme - matching students who were here over the Christmas holidays with members of the local community and with each other. We had 126 applications and were able to match 45 students with individuals and families.

Our President successful lobbied catering outlets on campus to be open for a longer period of time for postgraduates and other students and staff remaining on campus during the holiday period.

The Family network went on a trip to Leeds to go shopping and see the Christmas Market.

Finally, before term officially ended the GSA and Wentworth College held a Jingle Bell Ball featuring a visit from Father Christmas!

# January/February

## January

January saw one of the most significant changes to postgraduate life at the University of York with the creation of the Graduate Research School. The GSA worked closely with the University to set up the school and our President was on the recruitment panel appointing the school’s Dean. We have enjoyed a close working relationship with the new Dean of the Graduate School - Professor Tom Stoneham.

Owning to popular demand our President also created a series of Café Masters events to compliment Café Research.

We are also aware that as an organisation we don’t always shout about our successes so we produced a video highlighting our achievements during the autumn 2014/15 term.

Our officers were also privileged to attend the winter graduation ceremonies.

For the first time we ran a social night for research students who started at the university in January. Our new Vice-Presidents organised a pub crawl as well as a café crawl to cater to our diverse postgraduate community. We also took 50 students to Bicester Shopping Village.

## February

February 2015 was an extremely important month for the GSA as it was our 50th Anniversary! We don’t know a lot about our history but we do know that we were founded on the 25th February 1965. In order to find out more we recruited an intern to look back through the university’s archives located in the Borthwick Institute for Archives.

We received a bid through the Postgraduate Community Fund to start a Masters Network to complement our PhD Network. As it was such a good idea our officers decided to make the network an official GSA endeavour with access to our network budget and marketing opportunities. Students in the network ran a very successful launch event with over 80 attendees.

The GSA recruited a Course Representative Ambassador to work with postgraduate course representative to share ideas and give us feedback on issues within their department. Ellen ran a series of workshops with course reps as well as a session introducing research student representatives to the new Graduate School Dean.

February also means Valentine’s Day and our officers organised a speed dating event based around making new friends and possibly a date for Valentine’s Day itself. We liaised with our LGBTQ Network to ensure that the speed dating events was as inclusive as possible.

Having worked hard over the past few years to grow the Family Network we teamed up with YUSU to relaunch the network to make it more attractive to undergraduate students, their partners and their children. In February we ran a Pancake Day event with plenty of fun activities for children; and information for their parents and guardians.

We ran two trips in February – one to Fountains Abbey as well as Ripon; the other to Oxford, taking in the sights of Stonehenge on the way back.

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**In 2014/15 we provided over 400 hours of free sports sessions for our members, both during and outside of term time.**

# March/April

## March

We were approached by postgraduates who teach who did not feel that they were adequately supported by the university when teaching undergraduates with some disabilities. Our President worked with the Researcher Development Team and Disability Services in providing new training sessions on just this topic.

Our President also launched a Mental Health survey looking at students experiences of using local mental health services – both on and off campus. We had over 650 responses and the findings from the survey were presented to the University’s Student Experience Committee. The findings from the survey led to the creation of our Mind Your Head campaign.

In terms of events, we ran a successful International Lunch where students from all over the world brought a dish to share with others as well as a postgraduate coffee and cake session on campus.

The Family Network went on a trip to Yorkshire Wildlife Park and we also took 50 students to Edinburgh – taking in the Holy Island of Lindisfarne on the way back.

## April

April was a relatively quiet month for us as it was the Easter break, however we were busy preparing for our May elections and we continued to look at our past in the university archives. Otherwise, it was business as normal, attending meetings and meeting with students.

Along with Student Support Services we produced a booklet for students remaining on campus over the holiday letting them know what was open, where to go for help and what activities they could get involved with.

We also took 50 students on a trip to Newcastle.

# May

## May

May was a very busy month for the organisation. We ran our second ever full-time Presidential election which attracted five candidates - up from three the year before. Overall turnout was 14% of the postgraduate population – up by 35% from the year before. While this is very encouraging, more needs to be done to improve postgraduate engagement with our elections and to improve the number of nominations for the roles other than President. Despite the fact it was a close race for the President, the candidates ran positive campaigns and we are delighted to name the following winners who will be appearing in our 2015/16 report:

**President:**  
Rasha Ibrahim

**Vice-President (Postgraduate Engagement):**  
Menglin Liu

**Council Member:**  
Stephen Harper

**Student Trustee:**  
Kailing Xie

Our President organised an entire week of the events focusing on women and careers. Under the banner of ‘Impossible’, events included talks on equality for women in higher education and an early career research workshop. Panelists included: Professor Deborah Smith - Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research; Joan Concannon - Director of External Relations; Dr Vanita Sundaram - Senior Lecturer, Department of Education; Tracy Walters - Head of Strategic HR and OD at the City of York Council; Professor Paul Walton - Chair of the Athena SWAN Working Group; Dr Carolyn Hunter - Lecturer at The York Management School; and Dr Rosa Kit Wan Kwok - Research Fellow in Psycholinguistics, Plymouth University (York alumnus).

In the broader higher education sector the previous coalition government launched a consultation for introducing a loan system - similar to the UK undergraduate system - for taught postgraduate courses. The GSA submitted a response to the consultation highlighting some of our concerns with the effectiveness of the proposed system as well as suggesting some changes to how it could be implemented to be fairer to students. As an organisation we will continue to look out for government decisions on this issues and any others that affect our postgraduates.

In May we also took 50 students on a trip to Whitby Abbey and Robin Hood’s Bay.

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Election voter turnout was 14% of the postgraduate population – up by 35% from the previous year.

# June/July

## June

In June we focussed our attention on setting up the York Mind Your Head mental health campaign – we developed a logo for the project and came up with a mission statement and governance structure to try to ensure it was set up to be a sustainable student-led campaign. Our President began to structure the campaign’s website – designing it to be a one-stop resource for students to find out more about mental health support services available on and off campus. We also began to consult relevant services to ensure that the website’s content is as accurate and up-to-date as possible.

After our General Manager - Ken Leach - informed the trustee board he would be leaving the organisation at the end of September 2015 we started a recruitment round for a new CEO position for the organisation. Interviews were held in June and after a competitive search Ken, Jelena and Nigel Law - one of our trustees - were happy to appoint Peter Gorbert to the role starting in August 2015.

Our officers also attended the summer graduation ceremonies.

We also took 50 students on an overnight trip to the Lake District.



## July

In July we held the first Mind Your Head Committee meeting. We were overwhelmed with interest from both postgraduate students who were already at York as well as new students that wouldn’t be arriving until September. Early indications are that there is significant interest amongst the postgraduate population for a campaign like Mind Your Head and our Trustee Board approved plans to make Mind Your Head a ‘business as usual’ activity for the GSA.

The President and the General Manager devised and ran a number of training sessions for the President and Vice-Presidents.

We also worked hard on planning for Welcome Week 2015 and communicating with incoming postgraduates online.

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In total in 2014/15 we took over 750 students on trips across the UK.

# Letter from the General Manager



This year we celebrated not only our 50th Anniversary as an organisation but also our first year with a new representational structure and full-time President.

The positive changes to the organisation brought about by having a full time officer in the team has been immense. Having someone to produce ideas who has a broad overview of the GSA and university policy discussions has led to more effective interventions and measures being taken to improve postgraduate life at York. Large projects such as Mind Your Head have great potential for the future and our reciprocal relationship with the Graduate Research School has been a highlight of the year. Officer time is still largely taken up by attendance at university committees and working groups. While this is a fundamental part of the role, the organisation should work with the university in rationalising attendance to ensure officer time is used effectively. Having an additional full-time officer would help immensely in this regard.

Postgraduate Networks – a new part of our structure – have flourished this year with 200+ people now registered with our family network;

the student-led creation of a Masters Network and the continued growth of the PhD Network. Initiatives like Café Research and Café Masters have made us more approachable and open and this year has been characterised by the GSA working more closely with different student services across the university, for the benefit of our members.

We made strides to broaden the staff pool of the organisation with the creation of student ambassador positions. In the future we aspire to increase the pool of officer candidates at elections and individuals will have different skills and priorities. It is therefore essential that staff are able to lend their expertise and be flexible enough and fill any gaps through mentoring or training.

While I write this final letter with a tinge of sadness, I am leaving the organisation greatly satisfied with all we have achieved over the past year. I am also hugely optimistic about the future of the Graduate Students’ Association under new leadership.

**Ken Leach**  
**GSA General Manager**

## Preliminary end of year accounts

Please note that while these figures are likely to be indicative, our final end-of-year audited accounts will be produced at a later date.

**Income:** £200,188 • **Expenditure:** £204,014 • **Difference:** -£3,826\*

### Expenditure breakdown:

**Staff costs and overheads:** £154,175  
**Communications:** £15,218  
**Services and activities:** £25,021

**Representational Activity:** £2,880  
**Projects and campaigns:** £2,720  
**Graduate Community:** £3,999

\* This overspend is in line with a mid-year change in our Reserve Policy approved by the Trustee Board.



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