



**Graduate  
Students'  
Association**  
UNIVERSITY OF YORK



**ANNUAL REPORT**  
**2017/2018**



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## Representation

### NEW OFFICER AND COUNCIL STRUCTURE

This was the second year of the GSA's altered representative structure following last year's restructure and the introduction of the Vice President (Well-being and Community) role and the newly designed Association Council.

**President:** Charlotte Chamberlain  
**Vice President Wellbeing and Community:** Fatma Layas

#### Council:

**Council Chair:** Abikadi Dayib Askar  
**Communities Officer:** Mei Huang  
**Events Officer:** Annie Harrison  
**Equality Officer:** Tianyao Fan  
**Colleges Officer:** Mei Huang  
**Sports Officer:** Alessandro Cecchetti  
**Volunteering Officer:** Shuxin Yao

**Faculty Rep - Science:** Hanna Weiers  
**Faculty Rep - Social Sciences:** Fatema Al Rowaili  
**Faculty Rep - Arts and Humanities:** Heather Turner

### ELECTIONS

The GSA runs two sets of elections each year, one in the Autumn for our voluntary student council roles and one in Summer for our full time paid officer roles. We continue to struggle to engage

students in our Autumn elections, however this year we were able to gain enough interested candidates so that we filled all council positions including having 2 contested. As a result our election turnout was slightly higher than last year, but still only 3.5% turnout.

In order to deal with the unmanageable workload a decision was taken by the GSA Trustee Board and approved by our members at AGM, to split the President role into two separate roles and create a new role focussed on academic representation. This means that from 2018/19, the GSA will have three full-time officers - President, Vice President Well-being and Community and Vice President Academic. These three roles were elected in the summer.

This year we introduced a number of new elements to our summer elections, including a larger scale publicity campaign, more information provided through video and for the first time via WeChat. In order to better engage with our growing number of distance learners this year we introduced virtual hustings, which saw excellent interactions with students with one of the hustings videos reaching over 1200 views.

The Summer elections had a 16% turnout, which continues the upwards trend of previous elections. All of the positions were contested and there was a high level of visible campaigning on campus.

**MAKING  
POSTGRADS  
MATTER**

**GSA ELECTIONS  
2018**

### LINKS WITH OTHER GSA'S

This year the GSA made a concerted effort to form stronger links between other Graduate Unions and postgraduate officers in Students' Unions. We hosted a shared officer training event at the start of the year, inviting Keele Postgraduate Association and Cambridge Graduate Students Union to visit York in order to share best practice and explore common issues and ideas.

The GSA continues to be one of the leading organisations in the field of postgraduate representation with a growing number of students' unions across the country asking for our input on how to engage their members. Our officers continue to play an active role in the NUS postgraduate network, highlighting York's position as a place of excellence for postgraduate students.

### WORKING WITH YUSU

One of the most positive outcomes from this year was the strengthening of our working relationship with YUSU, in particular between our two officer teams. This led to collaboration on a number of projects and a regular sharing of information resulting in better outcomes for postgraduates and undergraduates.

### NATIONAL INFLUENCE

Following questions posed to key people in Higher Education (in person,

at events and via email), the GSA President and the Representation, Advice and Welfare coordinator were invited by Nicola Dandridge to the Office for Students (OfS) to be consulted about the priorities and issues concerning postgraduate students. This was a very useful visit for all involved, and has placed the GSA in an ongoing dialogue with the OfS as their go-to advisors on Postgraduate issues.

The GSA Officers also attended postgraduate conferences to share best practice and support networks. These included ones run by the NUS, as well as one by the Postgraduate Officer Network, in which the GSA is very active. These conferences underlined the value of the GSA as leading the sector in understanding the needs of postgraduates, with other Students Unions approaching them for advice and specialist knowledge.

### INDUSTRIAL ACTION

This academic year presented particular and specific difficulties for the GSA, including a period of Industrial Action. The GSA listened to the wide-ranging views of postgraduate students on the issues surrounding the strike, with council voting to keep the GSA neutral in the dispute. We therefore acted as a conduit of information to keep students informed as events progressed.

### REPRESENTATION AT UNIVERSITY COMMITTEES

Ensuring consistent representation at key university committees and project groups is a priority for the GSA, as it allows us to best act upon the views, wishes and needs of our constituent population. A growth in number of such committees and groups has, over the last year, resulted in greater representation in areas such as out of term time catering, postgraduate accommodation, postgraduates in colleges and mental health provision, alongside the core academic committees. In addition, the GSA were able to get more involved in larger University projects such as Together York, the Colleges Review and key university recruitments.

We also worked closely with the University's Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor for Teaching and Learning (Tracy Lightfoot), to help ensure the University understood the needs of its postgraduate taught students and was adequately catering for their needs. In addition to the work on PGTs we also supported the University with its offering to distance learners, surveying distance learners and working to create online support services and communities for those students, as well as actively targeting our communications to ensure that Distance Learners could be an active part of the Postgraduate Community.



## Academic

### COURSE & FACULTY REPRESENTATIVES

This year was highly successful in both the recruitment and engagement of over 153 course reps. The GSA ran termly faculty forums for reps to meet and discuss common issues, with a number identified and solved within the academic year. This year our Academic Reps were highly engaged, both with their departments and the GSA, resulting in a number of in-house departmental campaigns and changes to course structure.

Our three Faculty Reps were also highly valuable, coordinating and collecting feedback from the course reps within their faculties, as well as providing input and insight to the GSA council about the academic issues facing students.

### POSTGRADUATE PEDAGOGY

The GSA were heavily involved in the approval meetings for the PGT section of the York Pedagogy roll-out. We helped to find students to take part in the reviews, as well as sending officers to be a part of the panel for several departments.

### PERIODIC REVIEWS & REVALIDATION VISITS

The President undertook a number of Academic and Quality Assurance related tasks with the University during the year, including the revalidation visits to both of the University validation partners, and a number of periodic reviews of departments with high numbers of PG students.

### BERT REVIEW

Both officers were consulted and gave considerable feedback to the process of redesigning the Becoming an Effective Researcher Tutorial (BERT). This introductory module for research students has now been re-worked into providing targeted training and support at different points during the research process, rather than all at the beginning.

### PTES

The GSA worked with the Academic Support Office to send out and promote the 2018 Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey, resulting in a 30% participation rate.

### TOGETHER YORK

The GSA, YUSU and the PVC for Learning, Teaching and Students were tasked with creating 3 projects to help launch the University's 'Together York' statement. Each project was led by one of the three participants, with the GSA President taking the lead on 'Foundations for Life and Study', a project looking at suitability of the information given to students at the pre-arrivals stage.



## Welfare

### GSA ADVICE SERVICE

The GSA runs an independent and confidential advice service offering support to students on issues ranging from Academic Appeals and Exceptional Circumstances to welfare concerns around housing, finance health and well-being. Appointments are available in person, by telephone, skype or email to ensure that all students, including distance learners and international students, have access to our service.

### ACADEMIC CASEWORK STATS

This year proved to be another busy one for our advice service, seeing a slight increase in the number of new student cases (up 1 case on the previous year to 168). This is the 5th consecutive year of increases in casework numbers. A high level of demand in the YUSU advice service also meant that the amount of time spent by their advisors on Postgraduate cases was limited.

This year brought additional complications in regards to postgraduate taught casework as many of the cases we were supporting students with were taking much longer than the universities advertised time-scales. This led to additional work managing the anxieties of those students as they were left waiting for a long period to learn the outcomes of their appeals.

### MENTAL ILLNESS AWARENESS WEEK

The GSA's Mental Health project - Mind Your Head worked with the VP: Well-being and Community to host a week of evening talks focussing on Mental Illnesses. Each talk focussed on a different mental illness and featured input from leading experts on the mental illness alongside individuals with lived experience. The talks were well received and streamed online to a much larger audience.

### EXAM STRESS CAMPAIGNS

For the January exam period, we ran a #takeabreak campaign giving away GSA Study mugs containing a teabag, a pen, information about the advice service and tips for relieving stress. This was a popular campaign with over 600 mugs being given out, and the GSA was praised for promoting sustainability in the process.

Following this, we launched De-stress Week during the first week of term 3, when the majority of postgraduate exams take place. We ran 5 sessions including massages in the library foyer, craft activities, a guide dog session, fruit and water give-aways and stress management workshops. These sessions were fairly well received and allowed for further promotion of the advice service.

### GSA TEA AND COFFEE POINTS

In a follow up to our January #Takeabreak campaign we launched a dedicated tea and coffee point in the postgraduate areas of the University library and King's Manor. These were points allowing students to pick up free tea, coffee, sugar and milk sachets in exchange for a small donation or feedback. These points proved to be very popular and provided the opportunity for the GSA to receive regular feedback on our performance.

### SUMMER SKILLS WEEK

After the success of last year's Summer Skills week we repeated our week of skills-based workshops for 2018. These sessions were an opportunity to improve confidence and other social skills along with practical skills. All sessions were moderately attended, with support provided from many societies including baking, knitting and comedy societies.

**95.65%  
AGREE**

OVERALL I WAS SATISFIED  
WITH THE SERVICE  
AVERAGE 5.51  
OUT OF 6

"REALLY HELPFUL  
TO GET SOMEONE  
ELSE'S OPINION AND  
ADVICE AS TO HOW  
TO PROCESS MY  
COMPLAINT"

"USEFUL AND  
HELPFUL  
TOTALLY  
SATISFIED"

**93.48%  
AGREE**

I GOT THE  
ADVICE I NEEDED  
AVERAGE 5.43  
OUT OF 6

**93.48%  
AGREE**

THE STAFF WERE FRIENDLY  
AND APPROACHABLE  
AVERAGE 5.43  
OUT OF 6

"I TALKED TO  
SUSIE AND SHE  
WAS REALLY  
FRIENDLY AND  
SEEMED QUITE  
PROFESSIONAL AT  
THE SAME TIME.  
THANK YOU "

"GRAEME IS  
AN AMAZING  
PERSON, HE IS  
VERY HELPFUL"

" LOUISE IS AN  
AMAZING PERSON. I  
AM VERY HAPPY TO  
HAVE THE CHANCE TO  
HAVE HER SUPPORT"





The GSA continues to support the development of its dedicated postgraduate networks, driving to make them student led and providing each network with its own budget and responsibility for spending.

### PHD NETWORK

The PhD Network has continued to offer PhD Students with regular cake afternoons and evening drinks events. The “Secret Life of a PhD” event, a joint Masters and PhD Network event, was again the most popular event of the year. The PhD Network also provided valuable feedback for the restructure of the BERT tutorial and supported the setup of a new set of workshops focussing on the challenges faced when starting a PhD.

### MASTERS NETWORK

The Masters Network delivered a number of events per term, usually following certain events throughout the year such as celebrations of assessment hand-ins and normally took the form of pizza socials and wine and cheese evenings. Attendance at these events varied throughout the year, with a lack of a dedicated coordinator being the main cause of lack of engagement.

### COLLEGE TUTOR NETWORK

The College Tutor network continued in its role to provide support to the masters and PhD students who live in college to support all students as college tutors. There was a noticeable lack of engagement with the College Tutor Network this year, but regular, small scale events took place throughout the year with a small following.

### LGBTQ NETWORK

The LGBTQ Network was again our most active network this year, with regular events every few weeks. The network once again produced a wide range of events to celebrate LGBT History Month in February, featuring in the main programme of events for the city. As a result of their hard work, our network coordinator Toby Gormley won the GSA Award for best network.

### FAMILY NETWORK

The Family Network continued its good work providing weekly play sessions at the St Lawrence’s Centre every Monday, along with a calendar of events throughout each term. Success came from “multi-activity” afternoons that included activities for children of all ages, supported by student groups and societies from the University. Activities around half-term and holidays such as Christmas, Halloween and Easter have also proven to be very popular.

### GTA NETWORK

In the Spring term we began work on our newest network, for Graduate Teaching Assistants. We had received continual feedback from GTAs that they would appreciate a forum in which to discuss common issues and solutions and share experiences. Whilst this was initially set to start meeting in March, the Industrial Action and subsequent impact on GTAs delayed this, and it was considered practical to work on setting the group up, ready to launch with events for the start of the 18/19 Academic year.

### NETWORK WEEK

In addition to Welcome Week and to provide an additional schedule of activities during the first week of the academic year when postgraduate students are still arriving, we ran a series of events to encourage students to get to know one another in more detail and introduce our postgraduate networks. Each network had a dedicated event acting as a welcome social. These events were very well attended and ensured students were aware of the function of each of the networks.



## Community

### PG COMMUNITY FUND

This year, the postgraduate community fund chose five outstanding projects to be funded. Although we were unable to fund every project that was applied for, we were able to offer feedback and support to help applicants continue projects that would not be accessible to the wider PG community.

#### PhD Careers Outside Academia £460

More than 50% of PhD students end up in careers outside academia. Advice on possible alternative career pathways was under-represented so two HYMS students set up an event inviting experts that transitioned from academia into non-university research to introduce the institute/company they are working for, who provided some insight into their daily life routine. This was a well attended event and setup an important link between postgrads in HYMS both in York and Hull.

#### Storytelling for Public Engagement Workshop £750

This workshop was excellent for doctoral and early career researchers seeking innovative ways to make their research engaging to others in their field and beyond, as well as outside academia. An interactive, dynamic session that helped researchers communicate their research more effectively and confidently with diverse audiences. Master Storyteller Tim Ralphs is a highly acclaimed consultant who is known for being a captivating speaker and has received awards for his work including Young Storyteller of the Year and the British Award for Storytelling Excellence.

#### Derwent GCRC £150

Funding to support the Derwent GCRC in their growing outreach, social and academic projects for postgraduate students.

#### CSSA Chinese New Year Fair £300

Over 20 stalls including cultural, games and international societies providing special lunar new year activities for all students.

#### King's Manor Research Community £180 + additional funding

Based off the success of a previous community fund event for IPUP, this project featured a series of events bringing together all postgraduate Researchers based at the King's Manor in a sustainable way.

### ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSES

The GSA set up and ran a new volunteering project, with the help of the Centre for English Language Teaching (CELT) offering students the opportunity to run conversational English sessions for the partners of international students. This was very popular, and won a 2018 University of York Student Volunteering Award. The sessions also engaged a wider group of students with the GSA, some of whom later ran for sabbatical officer positions in the summer election cycle.





## › Sports

### FREE SPORTS SESSIONS

The GSA has continued to offer free sports sessions for all postgraduate students to provide opportunities for students to stay active and enjoy competitive sports at times that suit them. These include:

*Tennis*  
*Badminton*  
*Basketball*  
*Squash*  
*Football*  
*Netball*  
*Volleyball*



"VERY HAPPY WITH THE GSA FOOTBALL EVENT ON A SUNDAY EVENING - WAS USED REPEATEDLY!" - POSTGRADUATE EXPERIENCE SURVEY 2018

"THE SPORT IS EXCELLENT!" - POSTGRADUATE EXPERIENCE SURVEY 2018

We consulted with the GSA Council who helped in advising any times which were preferred, as well as highlighting any clashes with college sport or other activities. Some minor changes were made this year, but the sports offering remained mainly the same over 2017/18.

The GSA also worked with the University and York Sport to identify the specific sports needs of Postgraduate students, from identifying key cultural barriers for participation to the scheduling of sports sessions around teaching and learning hours.



## Services

### INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS SUMMER EVENTS

This year the GSA continued our summer activity partnership with the International Pathway College, Centre for English Language Teaching and Centre For Global Programmes to try and link up the activities we all deliver over the summer. This alongside some additional funding provided by the University allowed us to recruit a summer activity coordinator and provide a variety of trips and activities over the summer period.

### EVENTS

In 2017/18, the GSA held a wide range of events to suit all tastes. The setup of a regular weekly pub quiz proved popular with a modest following each week. Events focused around holidays such as Halloween and Valentines provided an anchor for most of our plans. Evening events that had previously been well attended saw a slight dip such as the comedy nights and karaoke. We also provided a selection of welcome events in week 2 of term 2 for new PhD students starting at that time.

Most events were run by the Events and Communications coordinator and the council Events Officer in the GSA, with the Summer Activities coordinator and additional members of the GSA Council organising additional events over the year.

To support more events in the future we will be looking to recruit volunteers for specific types of events to run in rotation, similar to the pub quiz.

### TRIPS

The GSA organised 13 trips over the academic year 2017/18, with a mix of city tours, visits to attractions and local sight-seeing. Ticket sales saw a slight decrease this year, with just a few trips selling out. Trips under £20 (without an additional entrance fee for an attraction) were the most popular. Few trips were organised during the Spring term, with the backdrop of the University pension strikes making it a challenging time to sell tickets. Efforts will be made next year to provide trips to locations with lower costs.

### WELCOME WEEK

Welcome Week took place between 18th - 24th September and was once again our best attended event, with over 3420 attendees over the welcome period. Welcome Week was lead by the Communications and Events coordinator along with a dedicated events intern who worked from July – September supporting events throughout this time. Having an events intern greatly reduced the workload which would have fallen solely on the C&E coordinator and allowed for most aspects of Welcome Week to run a lot more smoothly. Individual event wristbands were

taken out in favour of one week-long wristband priced at £15, which sold out of its allocation. Popular events included the Welcome Party, which included a range of activities to suit all tastes, the Info Fair which saw a record number of attendees and the City Bar Crawl. Including money raised from this year's information fair, Welcome Week ran at a profit of £1401.38.

### GSA AWARDS

The year ended with a new event "the GSA Awards" which provided an opportunity to celebrate the achievements of the GSA that year and reward those who have volunteered their time.

#### A list of the awards and the winners:

- **GSA Volunteer of the year:** Liam Cutler
- **Best Network:** LGBTQ Network: Toby Gormley
- **GSA Councilor of the year:** Annie Harrison
- **Course rep of the year:** Heather Turner
- **Postgraduate Community Spirit:** Jamie Khoo
- **Making Postgrads Matter:** Ioana Cismas
- **Great Service Award:** Carie Taylor

"THE EVENTS I HAVE BEEN TO ON CAMPUS WERE A LOT OF FUN AND THE WELCOME WEEK WAS ESPECIALLY WELL RUN" - POSTGRADUATE EXPERIENCE SURVEY 2018

"I WAS A BIG FAN OF THE WELCOME WEEK EVENTS, AND FELT LIKE THE UNIVERSITY REALLY CARED FOR ITS PG STUDENTS BECAUSE OF IT ALL" - POSTGRADUATE EXPERIENCE SURVEY 2018

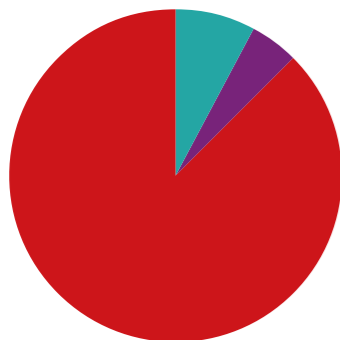
"WELCOME WEEK WAS ABSOLUTELY FANTASTIC, AND I MET MOST OF MY FRIENDS DURING THOSE EVENTS, OR THROUGH THEM AT A LATER POINT. " - POSTGRADUATE EXPERIENCE SURVEY 2018



## CEO Report and Finances

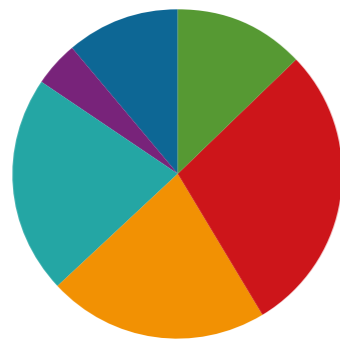
This was one of the busiest and most challenging years for the GSA. Our recent developments and improvements has highlighted our value to the University and resulted in requests to be involved in more work than ever before. While this presented us with new opportunities to represent and improve services for postgraduates, it came at the cost of increased demand on our fairly humble staffing resources.

TOTAL INCOME - £221K



- University Grant
- Event Income
- Other Income

TOTAL EXPENDITURE - £205K



- Representation
- Services
- Academic and Welfare
- Core Operating Costs
- Community
- Sports

These are all based on draft figures.

In particular there were significant demands on the officers time, who alongside their already sizeable committee load, were asked to be involved in two large scale service reviews, the postgraduate pedagogy review, a review of academic representation, the industrial action and three Together York projects, all of which required a significant time commitment over and extended period of time. As a result our officer teams struggled to find time for pursuing personal projects and manifesto pledges as well as directly engaging and communicating with postgraduates.

Building on the success of the new Research Assistant we were able to gain additional funding to increase this post to two days a week. This allowed us to continue to deliver our two main annual surveys (PG Welcome Survey and Annual Postgraduate Experience Survey) but to also carry out more detailed analysis than we have in previous years. This year we were also able to carry out a number of new research pieces to help inform the university work, in particular looking at motivations to study, international experience and inequality of provision.

Midway through the year we were seeing a significant dip in student attendance at our events and trips resulting in lower than budgeted income, with the majority of our expenditure tied up in staff posts we have very little room to absorb a significant drop in income.

We attempted to cut back on unnecessary expenditure which wouldn't impact on student experience in order to minimise the potential deficit. Thankfully engagement in our activities picked up significantly after the strike period and income came in on target for the year.

The increasing demands on officer time also led to a decrease in the funding spent on officer related activity as they were unable to organise the student facing projects we aimed to deliver this year.

In addition to this it was discovered that we were being double charged for employee pension contributions, which was resulting in pension contributions being double the forecasted amount.

The pension repayments, coupled with the early cost saving work and unspent budget for officer projects resulted in a sizeable surplus for the year.

Ultimately this was another successful year for the GSA, but one which is unsustainable long term. This year highlighted the need to develop the infrastructure of the GSA so we can better prepare our officers and students whilst providing additional capacity to deal with unexpected opportunities and challenges.

In budgeting for the forthcoming year the GSA will be looking at increasing it's staff capacity and bringing in an additional officer to better share the workload and deliver better representation to our growing membership.







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