



## Annual Report 2016 / 2017





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## Representation

### NEW OFFICER AND COUNCIL STRUCTURE

This was the first year of the GSA's new representative structure following last year's restructure and the introduction of the Vice President (Wellbeing and Community) and the newly designed Association Council. This allowed the GSA to offer more smaller scale events and engage with its members on a more regular basis whilst providing consistent and regular representation at University committees.

**President:** Rasha Ibrahim  
**Vice President Wellbeing and Community:** Kate Stephenson

#### Council:

**Council Chair:** Saad Alzahrani  
**Communities Officer:** Gracia Paramitha  
**Events Officer:** Joseph Willis  
**Equality Officer:** Annis Stead  
**Colleges Officer:** Momchil Kyuparski  
**Sports Officer:** Danielle Watkins  
**Volunteering Officer:** Vacant

#### Faculty Rep - Social Sciences:

Emma Davies

#### Faculty Rep - Arts & Humanities:

Miyuki Kamiya/Mimi O'Neill

#### Faculty Rep - Sciences:

Alix Partridge

### ELECTIONS

The GSA runs two sets of elections each year, one in the Autumn and one in Summer. This was the first year that we didn't have any paid positions in our Autumn elections as a result of our constitutional review.

This year we also transitioned towards a new election platform, which allowed a more streamlined and simple voting process. The complicated and confusing election process of previous years had been cited as the main reason for student apathy during the voting process.

The Autumn elections had a 3% turnout. We had nominees for all of the council positions apart from the volunteering officer, however the majority of positions went uncontested, which had an impact on excitement around the elections and ultimately the turnout.

The Summer elections has a 14% turnout, one of the highest seen by the GSA election turnouts in years. All of the positions were contested and there was a high level of visible campaigning on campus.

### 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. Our officers attended two postgraduate representative conferences, to share best practice and support.

We were able to forge strong links with Keele Postgraduate Association and Cambridge Graduate Students Union, visiting both organisations and learning how they support their postgraduate communities.

### REPRESENTATION AT UNIVERSITY COMMITTEES

The new welfare focused sabbatical role meant the GSA could have more consistent representation at the non-academic university committees, allowing us to become more involved in ensuring the university welfare services catered for all postgraduates. Issues that we worked on this year included: - out of term time catering; postgraduate accommodation; postgraduates in colleges and mental health provision for postgraduates. In addition to this the GSA were able to be actively involved with larger university projects such as the work around sexual violence, the review of incident reporting systems and the Respect campaign.

We also worked closely with the University's new Association Pro-Vice Chancellor (Tracy Lightfoot), to help ensure that the University understood the needs of its postgraduate taught students and was tailoring its provision accordingly. 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. Both of these are areas in which we hope to work with the University more in the future.

## Academic

### STANDARDS OF SUPERVISION

Supervision was the root cause of most of the issues with PhD students we supported through our advice service. A big part of this was a misunderstanding of the roles and responsibilities in regards to supervision. This year we worked with the York Graduate Research School to develop a Standards of Supervision document to outline the expectations in an accessible format, which would be discussed and agreed by supervisors and supervisees at the start of the year. This was completed and ready for implementation for the coming academic year.

**98%  
AGREE**  
I GOT THE  
ADVICE I  
NEEDED

**"VERY HELPFUL.  
EASY TO BOOK  
AN APPOINTMENT  
ONLINE AND  
FURTHER SUPPORT  
OFFERED IF NEEDED,  
WHICH WAS VERY  
APPRECIATED"**

**"VERY  
HELPFUL  
MANAGED  
TO FIND A  
SOLUTION TO  
SITUATION."**

**"[THE ADVISOR]  
WAS VERY HELPFUL  
AND INFORMED AND  
WENT THROUGH MY  
OPTIONS IN CONCISE  
AND CLEAR WAY.  
MANY THANKS."**

### ACADEMIC CASEWORK

This year proved to be another busy one for our advice service, seeing a 12% increase in the number of student cases. 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 in which we were supporting students were taking much longer than the universities advertised timescales. This led to additional work managing the anxieties of those students as they were left waiting for a long period of time to learn the outcomes of their appeals.

**100%  
AGREE**  
THE STAFF WERE  
APPROACHABLE  
& FRIENDLY

**"VERY  
FRIENDLY AND  
SUPPORTIVE!  
THANK YOU!"**





### STUDENT HEALTH NEEDS IN YORK

Student Mental health continued to be a focus for the work of the city. GSA staff and officers were at the forefront of the city's discussions on how to improve student mental health, insuring the PG's and international students were involved in the data gathering and future plans for the city.

Our Vice President supported the City's Public Health team with the design and rollout of a large scale research project looking at the health needs of students in York. The survey was able to attract a large number of respondents and as a result a comprehensive report with development areas was compiled. The Vice President played a key role in feeding this information back to the University and ensuring that they were aware of the findings.

### EXAM STRESS CAMPAIGNS

For the January exam period, we ran a series of exam drop-in sessions, allowing students to pick up free water, fruit and chocolate from the GSA Office inbetween exams and revision sessions. The aim of these drop in sessions was to encourage students to take regular breaks, as well as an opportunity for students to meet and chat to the officers.

Following this, we launched De-stress Week during the first week of term 3, when the majority of postgraduate exams took place. We ran 4 sessions including massages in the library foyer and craft activities. These sessions were well received and allowed for further promotion of the advice service.

### WINTER WARM UP WEEK

In a follow up to our January Exam de-stress sessions, we ran a week of events in Week 5 of term two, promoting wellbeing practices and the advice service. There were 5 events over 5 days, attracting over 180 people. The Guide Dog lounge was particularly popular and was repeated later in term three.

### SUMMER SKILLS WEEK

In response to students wanting to learn new skills, we ran a week of skills based workshops in week 5 of term three. These sessions were an opportunity to improve confidence and other social skills along with practical skills. All sessions were well attended, with the self-defence workshop proving particularly popular, with follow up sessions being requested by some students.

OVER 500 PEOPLE  
ATTENDED TALKS  
ORGANISED BY MIND YOUR  
HEAD AS PART OF MENTAL  
ILLNESS AWARENESS WEEK



# Community

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 coffee mornings, cake afternoons and evening drinks events. One of the “big wins” for the PhD Network this year was the “Secret Life of a PhD” event. A joint Masters and PhD Network event, it was coordinated by PhD students which gave an insight into how to apply, and what day-to-day life is like for PhD students at York. This was a very popular event which received positive feedback from all involved.

## 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 but benefitted from having a dedicated coordinator.

## 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 our most active network this year, with a regular events every fortnight. 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 Annis Stead was nominated for a Love York Award for Contribution to diversity and inclusivity.

## 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.

## 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

The postgraduate community fund has again been very popular, with 7 outstanding projects being chosen. 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.

**Global inequality documentary screenings £550**

Two documentary film screenings followed by guest lectures and discussion groups about the film's topics regarding fast fashion and capitalistic recycling industry.

**Everyone's a critic! £500**

A short course teaching graduate students to write and publish theatre reviews, including a trip to a play with follow up discussion.

**Derwent GCRC £500**

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

**PAHC-IPUP Networking Lunches £300**

Providing opportunities for PAHC and IPUP postgraduate research students to get to know each other and their research, with a view to foster the development of collaborative interdisciplinary projects in the future.

**Beekeeping Society £1000**

Funding for a new society run by postgraduate students to provide two hives and dedicated support for future development.

**Vanbrugh's Giant Chess set £500**

Funding for some garden furniture items for the Vanbrugh college garden, aimed at increasing the usage of the space alongside their programme of postgraduate events.

**Little Asian Cultural Event £666.55**

Three courses to teach people how to make Chinese tea, play Gamelan music and cook Indonesian food, to share cultural understanding about these Asian countries.





## › Sports

### FREE SPORTS SESSIONS

The GSA has continued to offer free sports sessions for all postgraduate students in order to provide opportunities for students to stay active and enjoy competitive sports at times that suit them. The sports offering has stayed the same over 2016/17 with many active participants from all ages, backgrounds and nationalities. These include:

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



"IT'S GREAT  
 THAT THE SPORT  
 IS FREE! REALLY  
 ENJOYED IT AND  
 THE FACT THAT  
 EVERYONE WAS  
 A POSTGRAD."

"THEY WERE  
 GREAT WAY TO  
 MEET FELLOW  
 POSTGRADUATES"

Work was carried out by this years sports officer to monitor the usage of the sessions and this led to a reduction in some bookings and an increase in others. Further work is planned for next year, to ensure the sports offering still caters for the needs of students, both in terms of type of sports and times of sessions.



## Services

### INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS SUMMER EVENTS

With funding for certain departments getting together and the number of pre-sessional students planned to grow in the future, we decided to review the way we delivered summer events for our students.

This year the GSA brought together staff from 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. Each partner agreed to deliver one type of activity and open them up to other students, allowing for a wider range of successful events for all students. The GSA took on responsibility for organising trips and larger scale events.

### EVENTS

With a dedicated Events and Communications Coordinator in post, the GSA held over 50 events, with a range to suit all tastes. Events that were particularly popular included a comedy night each term, with links now established with both local and national comedy promoters, and our series of adventure game treasure hunts, combining physical and mental activities with a theme. There was also a mix of regular events including coffee mornings, potlucks and book/clothes swaps which garnered a small following.

Most events were run by the Events and Communications coordinator and the Vice President. Additional events were run by the Events Officer in the GSA, Summer Activities coordinators and additional members of the GSA Council. To support more events in the future we will be looking to recruit a volunteer events team.

### TRIPS

The GSA organised 13 trips over the academic year 2016/17, with a mix of city tours, visits to attractions and local sight-seeing. Ticket sales saw an increase this year, with most trips selling out. Switching to online ticket providers for some of our low cost trips also encouraged more students to attend due to the lower booking fee. The most popular trips took place in terms one and three, with waiting lists having to be added to keep up with demand. Trips during term two were less popular and efforts will be made to explore how to ensure the GSA can provide trips at the most convenient times for students.

### WELCOME WEEK

The GSA provides welcome activities for all postgraduate students in week 0 as a way of welcoming them to the University, the city and in most cases the country. This year we provided more events than ever before, introducing new ideas alongside old favorites. We welcomed over 2600 attendees to our events across the week.

Welcome Week was a huge success with positive feedback coming from University staff and students alike. Specific praise was received in relation to the quality and range of events.

We continue to encounter difficulties when it comes to communicating with our new students, which unfortunately means that many arrive having missed welcome week and the social opportunities it provides. We will continue to work with the University to improve our pre-arrivals communication.

"I WAS PLEASANTLY SURPRISED BY THE QUALITY OF THE COMEDY. THE CEILIDH WAS GREAT FUN, TOO I THOUGHT IT WAS GREAT HOW A POINT WAS MADE TO WELCOME INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS."

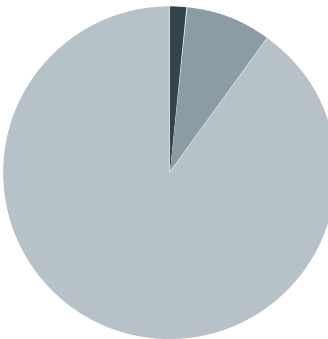




## » CEO Report and Finances

The GSA continued to grow and develop this year. The new officer structure brought with it more paid student representative time and increased student voice within the GSA. There were also changes within the staff team, with a new Communications and Marketing Coordinator starting along with the creation of a research focussed staff post.

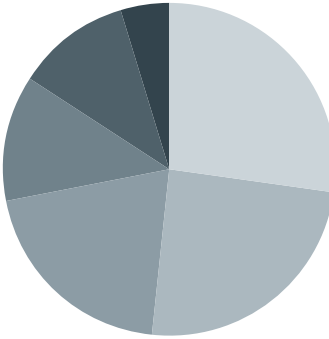
TOTAL INCOME - £206K



- University Grant
- Event Income
- Other Income

These are all based on draft figures.

TOTAL EXPENDITURE - £192K



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

While only a one day a week role, the new Research Assistant role allowed us to increase the amount of direct feedback we gathered from students as well as improving the quality of the analysis of the survey data we had already gathered. Amongst other things, this allowed the GSA to provide the University with useful information on the motivations of students and the needs of international students at the start of the year.

The GSA moved to a new office location in Vanbrugh during the summer period, moving us away from the postgraduate college and closer to the centre of campus, in the hope to distinguish ourselves from Wentworth and better cater for the postgraduates who don't live on campus.

The office move also coincided with a full organisational rebrand and launch of new designed GSA website. The fresh bright look was well received by students and university staff. This relaunch allowed us to create a buzz on campus and really increase the visibility of the GSA as we moved forward.

Despite having some unbudgeted costs linked to the office move and the rebrand, the GSA was able to make a number of in-year efficiency savings that allowed it to again deliver a small surplus for the year, despite initially forecasting a small deficit.

This surplus was larger than we would have liked, as several budgets linked to student led activities didn't get spent with students running the events at very little expense. This does pose a challenge for future budgets as we want to provide students with the potential to spend this money despite the fact they haven't done so in recent years.

While on the surface this is a nice problem to have it does further increase reserves, which are earmarked for the development of a physical postgraduate space that currently has no guarantee of happening.

Ultimately this was another successful year for the GSA allowing us to provide improved outcomes for our students and playing a wider role within the larger university context, something which we're hopeful will continue in future years.







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