



GSA



KEEP HOME AND CARRY ON



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Graduate Students' Association

UNIVERSITY OF YORK

Annual Report 19/20



Welcome to the GSA Annual Review 19/20

Introduction

Contents

Introduction from your Sabbatical Officer Team

As your elected student sabbatical representatives, we're delighted to share this report with you underlining some of the important campaigns and support that we've worked hard to deliver during this year on behalf of all our postgraduate student members.

As the principal postgraduate representative body at the University of York, we are one of only two dedicated Postgraduate Student Unions in the country. We take seriously our responsibility to raise Postgraduate issues not just locally but also on a UK wide national scale. This year we faced many challenges, including University-wide industrial action and what defined the year for many of us from Spring onwards, the Covid 19 pandemic. Dramatically altering the course of our study and everyone's lives, we moved quickly to help our members adapt as best as possible and never stopped campaigning on your behalf throughout this year.

Aside from helping mitigate for Covid, one of our key outcomes was to create stronger representation on your behalf. During the academic year we worked hard to expand our representation structure at a time it was needed most, as well as strengthening our events and networks provision to ensure a proper support structure in place throughout your entire time at York.

We also expanded our team, bringing on board a new Events and Community Coordinator and at the outset of Covid, immediately launched our 'Keep Home and Carry On' campaign; providing postgraduates a regular dependable roster of online events, support and representation to help students throughout one of the most difficult experiences of all of our lives.

Delivering both strong representation and support for Postgraduate students at the University of York, we hope that you find our achievements motivating and inspiring. If you'd like to find out more about the GSA, volunteer, or discover how to get involved providing services and events we'd love to hear from you. Please contact info@yorkgsa.org or visit our website www.yorkgsa.org for more information.

Purnur, Jane and Clara
GSA Sabbatical Officer Team 2019/20



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Officer and Council Structure



President:
Purnur Altay



VP Academic:
Jane Baston



VP Wellbeing and
Community:
Clara Garcia

Council Representatives

Chair of Council - **Suzanne Lengewa**
 Communities Officer - **Minko Minev**
 Events Officer - **Charlotte Lade**
 Sports Officer - **Ayse Ciftci**
 Volunteering Officer - **Sameer Jangam**
 Colleges Officer - **Elizabeth Kuria**
 Equality Officer - **Jessie Shepherd**

Faculty Representatives

Arts and Humanities - **Amy Hopkins**
 Sciences - **Daniel Ghete**
 Social Sciences - **Kristian Putnam**

Increased our
student led
motions from
2 the previous
year to 5 and
now 17

The GSA revamped our Council Structure to increase opportunities for direct student engagement.



Representation

First Ever Online Elections

In this difficult climate, the GSA team moved quickly to adapt an online only election system, rewriting regulations and refining our system in order to make it suitable for an election without any physical campaigning permitted.

The first national lockdown coincided with the GSA's Leadership Elections where three sabbatical officer and student trustee positions were available.

Despite this, the GSA enjoyed high candidate participation, with over 15 candidates nominating themselves for the four positions. Each candidate was trained and shown how to campaign in an online environment and the elections generally ran smoothly, with only one official complaint made during the process.

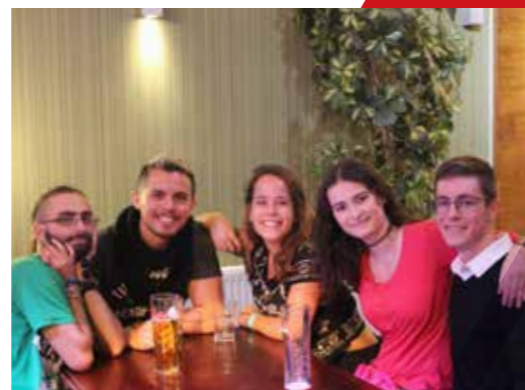
In the place of traditional in person hustings, we adapted to an online environment to ensure that elections were as accessible as possible and that candidates remained both safe and visible throughout the process.

The first ever online only elections at the University of York resulted in electoral victories for Purnur Altay, Clara Garcia and Jane Baston.

Expansion of Democracy

This year we strengthened our student voice with increased academic and social justice representatives, with new positions for Course Rep and Part Time Officers.

The GSA also introduced a new Events Part Time role to help expand a core offer of activities and support a more diverse student population in community building opportunities.



Working with other Graduate Student Bodies

The GSA once again hosted the annual National Postgraduate Conference for the third year running in November 2020 with a large number of PG dedicated representatives in attendance from a wide range of Universities. Featuring a number of digital events to help for change on a national level and to exchange best practice, the GSA is increasingly becoming not just a provider or representation locally, but driving it nationally.

Development of the conference was ongoing throughout the 2019/20 academic year, but due to issues surrounding the Covid 19 pandemic it was moved to later in the year.

Raising the profile of Postgraduate Study

GSA Council decided to support the UCU Industrial Action for tackling the casualisation of the Postgraduate Students who Teach. These students have been provided with contracts from January 2021, which set out their rights and access to training and support. Our campaigns helped achieve this objective, ensuring not just equity, but an environment where our students can succeed.

A bridge between the Student Body and the University

Throughout the pandemic, the GSA acted as a vital link and day to day connection between the University and our members. We did this in a range of ways, making sure that our Officers acted as an accessible and inclusive point of contact on a wide range of rapidly changing academic and more broadly covid related issues. One of the most effective examples was the launch of FaQ Sessions with Senior Leaders.

Representation at University Committees

Our officers were able to lobby the University to Simplify its PhD extension process, bringing great relief to our members who especially struggled being at a distance and cut off from their research

and materials. We also were able to gain a cancellation of continuation fees for PGRs, especially important at a time when our students' income streams were hit and were unable to access the university. For Postgraduate Taught students, we helped advise and pass a safety net policy so that students would not be unfairly penalised through lack of access to resources and quality teaching.

We extensively lobbied the University to tackle sexual harassment, Mental Health and Structural Racism. We worked collaboratively with the YUSU advice service to develop a report on Sexual harassment at York, as well as defining a new students' vision statement, informed by a student consultation.





Welfare

Keep Home and Carry On Campaign

Just prior to the start of the government's first lockdown, the GSA launched the 'Keep Home and Carry On' campaign encouraging conscientious behaviour and awareness around Covid-19. The GSA signposted toward government webpages and university guidance, while also bringing students together with challenges and themed events. Students contributed in a number of ways, from joining in online exercise classes, to creating spotify playlists for one another, to sending in videos of them performing music, all to help combat feelings of isolation.

We also set up a Quarantine Community group for students to talk, share stories and discuss how they were feeling. We had close to a thousand members engage and a number of events were run through this platform prior to the wider adoption of Zoom by the University of York.

We ran frequent online events to build up a sense of community, often organising multiple events per day in order to keep students active and engaged with their Student Union and their university throughout a difficult time. During the March period alone we organised over fifty events and activities.

A few responses from our postgraduate members on the 'Keep Home & Carry On' Campaign

KEEP HOME AND CARRY ON

"I have just been watching the video you posted of FAQs. Thank you - it was really helpful"

"Thank you Clara for the exercise... I enjoyed it after being locked down for 2 weeks here in Erbil"

"Good work from @GSAYork putting together some virtual engagement activities for those stuck indoors"

"This is how our Student Association takes care of us"

"HUGE fan of this move from @GSAYork - in support of students distancing and isolation they will be releasing a calendar of online events that can keep the community going, even from afar"

"Many thanks to both you and Clara for the GSA FAQ video, it has been very helpful during these uncertain times"

Your Guarantor

The GSA were able to encourage the University to adopt the Your Guarantor service. This helps students, especially international students (who are the most vulnerable group in this area) to be able to access private accommodation by providing a rent guarantor when students do not have a family member to act as their guarantor. This well received change allows many international students to secure a guarantor when otherwise it would be impossible.

Mental Health

The GSA contributed to University Mental Health day with events like 'Look after each other' and 'Look after yourself' as well as organising de-stress spaces during assessment periods. This included training events in collaboration with Open Door and interactive student led events taking place in the centre of Market Square.

The GSA also launched a Mental Health Survey and coordinated regular Wellbeing Forums to ensure that students felt listened to and understood when talking about mental health.

Further to this, we lobbied the local health authority (Unity Health) to promote their Patients Participation Group.

Sexual Violence and Harrassment

During the 2019/20 academic year, the GSA undertook a student consultation on the University approach to sexual harassment and misconduct in collaboration with YUSU.

We remain committed to helping students organise against sexual violence and harrasment and have lobbied the University of York on a number of points including Student-staff relationships in order to make a safer university.

We helped students organise a street performance on the International Day against Violence against Women while also supporting student-led events for Sexual Abuse and Sexual Violence Awareness Week.





Academic

Review for the Centre for Medieval Studies was very successful with a **79%** response rate

279 cases opened during 2019/20 academic year



Course and Faculty Representatives

Course Representatives are the backbone of the GSA's academic representation. 190 Course Reps were elected during the 2019/20 academic year, after a highly successful election process. Throughout the year our academic representatives were engaged, proposing a number of departmental campaigns and changes to course structure.

Likewise, the voices of these Course Reps were vitally important when undertaking consultation in order to outline our response to the Covid 19 pandemic and how it affected teaching and learning.

Periodic Reviews

The GSA assisted the Student Engagement Development Coordinator at the University of York Students' Union (YUSU), in consultation with the Academic Support Office at the University of York to develop a new periodic review survey. The revision of the survey from previous years was twofold.

First, to improve the quality of responses and second, to ensure that the questions reflect the diversity of experience students face at each level of study (undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research).

The Period Review for the Centre for Medieval Studies was very successful with a 79% response rate. Further periodic reviews were similarly conducted for both HYMS and the Centre for Women's Studies with the assistance of the GSA and proved widely successful.

Decolonising University of York

Committed to making the University of York a more inclusive environment for all the GSA launched a series of campaigns surrounding the Decolonising University of York campaign, including several 'decolonise' events in collaboration with the YUSU academic officer. We also led a number of Black Lives Matter awareness events, the #decolonise your bookshelf campaign, alongside introducing a new BAME Network and BAME book club.

Student Voice Assistants Bid

The GSA and YUSU were awarded funding for a new student role designed to support and develop student voice and increase student representation. Three Postgraduate Student Voice Assistants were recruited by the GSA in order to build academic representation and liaise with Course Reps, strengthening both academic representation and student voice at the GSA.

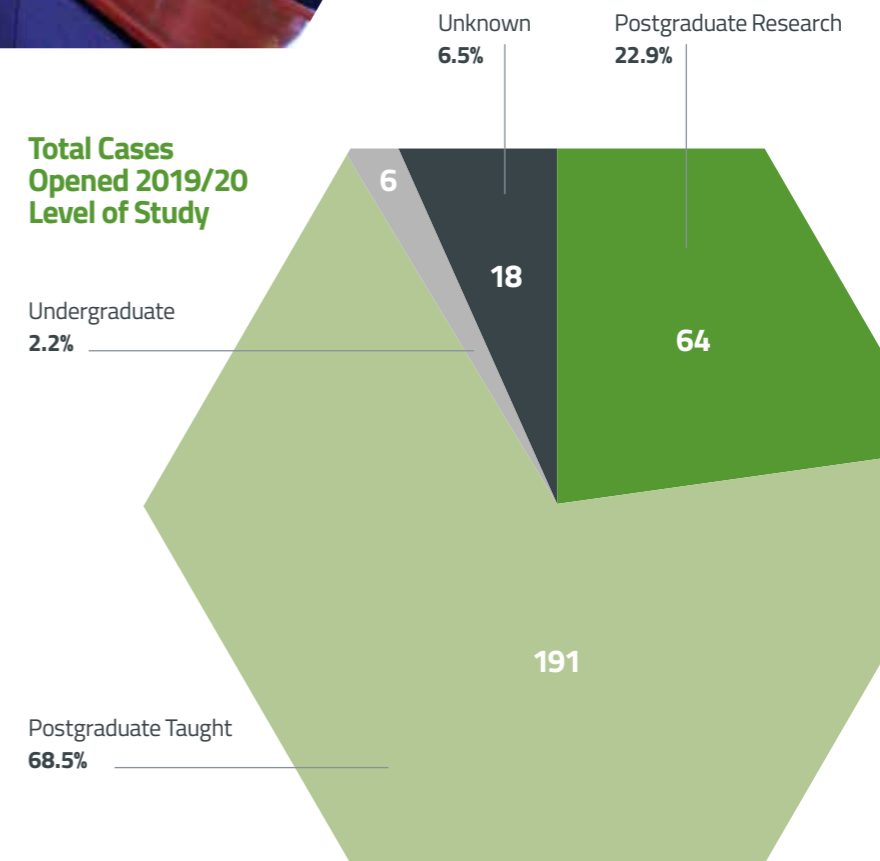
Advice Service

The GSA Advice Service provides free, independent and confidential advice, support and information to postgraduate students at the University of York on a range of academic and welfare matters. This includes topics such as appeals, complaints, academic misconduct, student misconduct and exceptional circumstances.

During the academic year, over 5% of our members accessed our GSA independent advice service directly, on top of which 279 cases were open during the academic year. This high increase in demand was close to double from the previous year, a trend seen more widely across both YUSU and the University. Throughout the pandemic, the GSA has been able to maintain its 1-2-1 student case work, with in office 'client meetings, complemented by a move to online appointments with the arrival of the pandemic since.

Of the 279 cases opened in the 2019/20 academic year, 64 (22.94%) related to Postgraduate Research students, 191 (68.46%) related to Postgraduate Taught students, 6 (2.15%) related to Undergraduate students and 18 (6.45%) related to students whose level of study is unknown.

Total Cases Opened 2019/20 Level of Study



Notable Issues

Issues	Opened Cases 2018 - 19 (number, percentage of total opened cases)	Opened Cases 2019 - 20 (number, percentage of total opened cases)	Change (number, percentage)
Appeals	120, 42.40%	92, 32.97%	-28, -23.33%
Exceptional Circumstances	55, 19.43%	38, 13.62%	-17, -30.91%
Academic Misconduct	22, 7.77%	52, 18.64%	+30, +136.36%



Over 50 events and activities in March alone

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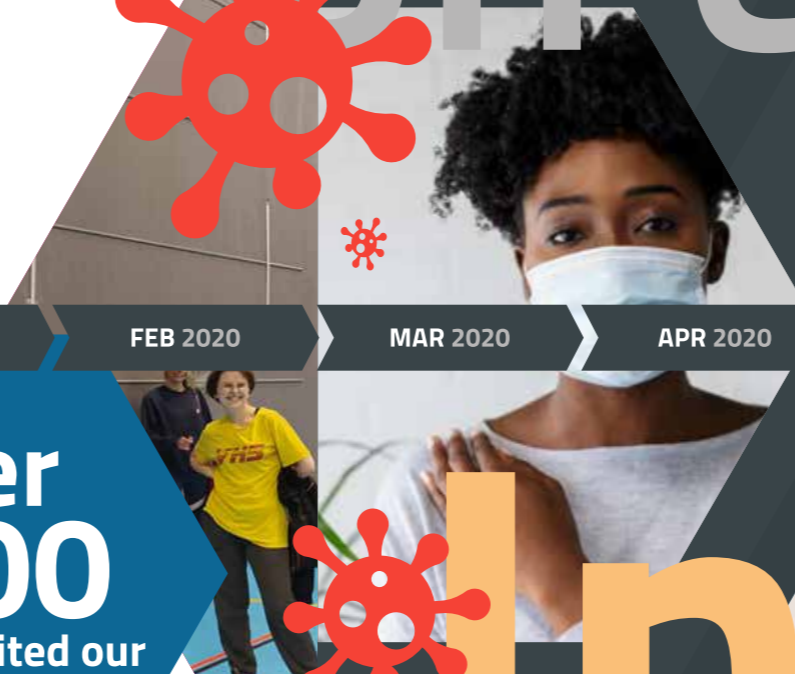
On Campus Off Campus

Free independent advice all year long

SEP 2019 | OCT 2019 | NOV 2019 | DEC 2019 | JAN 2020 | FEB 2020 | MAR 2020 | APR 2020 | MAY 2020 | JUN 2020 | JUL 2020 | AUG 2020

279 cases opened during 2019/20 academic year

Over 1600 students visited our Information Fair



Indoors

From trips across the country, to Zoom with a Zoo

15 Candidates ran in the University of York's first ever online only elections

7 FREE Sports

March 2020 First National Covid Lockdown Declared



Fitness sessions in our own living rooms

Outdoor In Person



Community

Over 2000 Postgraduate students are members of a GSA Network

Expansion of Networks

After student consultation and feedback, the GSA decided to expand its Postgraduate Networks in line with the demand for students. Networks increased in number, from 7 to 12. The additional Networks were selected based on a student consultation where a number of different options were presented to students, as well as the option to suggest their own Networks. This meant moving away from traditional 'educational based Networks' (masters and PhD) and towards a model based on shared interests or heritage (Food Network, BAME Network).

The reporting structure of Networks also changed. They are now run by two individuals: a Network Coordinator, responsible for getting in touch with students, and a Social Secretary, responsible for creating events, though students may share these responsibilities in accordance to the demands on their time whilst at the University of York.

Likewise, a new monthly meeting has been created between the Events and Community Coordinator and Network leaders, giving some much needed oversight and structure to the process.

Network Week

After the success of last years Network Week in introducing new students to the GSA's student-led community groups, we decided to run Network Week again with an emphasis on free and accessible smaller scale events to complement our wider offer post Welcome. These events would be the starting points in order for students to take control of their own social life at York, by becoming Network Coordinators or simply active members of a Network.

We delivered a strong schedule of events, both on campus and in the city, which were all well attended, especially the in-city events such as the Bookshop Crawl and Snickelway Tour. Eleven events were run over seven days.

Graduate Teaching Assistant Network

Food Network

PhD Network

Online and Part Time Students Network

College Tutor Network

Disabled Students Network

Nights Out Network

BAME Students Network

Postgraduate Community Fund

A vital support fund to allow PG students to bid for money to fund community building projects and a platform for celebrating their success, for example, providing rejuvenation projects and access to community spaces for Postgraduates to interact within.

Designed to benefit the Postgraduate community, not only does this provide experience for the organisers in terms of managing budgets and interviewing, but it has a marked benefit on student life by increasing student led provision directly reflecting PG's interests (e.g. academic events; new one off spaces; fun global activities etc. plus the benefit of leveraging awareness of both the fund and GSA support.

York Postgraduate Interdisciplinary Forum

The GSA funds the York Postgraduate Interdisciplinary Forum (YPIF) to promote interdisciplinary study and the sharing of knowledge and learning across departments.

YPIF ran a number of academic and community focused events designed to bring together students from a variety of academic backgrounds in order to foster a sense of community at the University of York and to promote shared learning. This project was originally funded via the Postgraduate Community Fund, but due to its ongoing success is now funded and supported directly via the GSA.

International Students Network

LGBTQ+ Network

Family Network

Master's Network

YPIF is directly student organised and led



Sports

'Friendly'

"I'm really glad to have found a session that's inclusive and open to anyone and there's no prejudice"

"I always wanted to play soccer in the UK and I'm so happy the GSA gave me this opportunity"

'Inclusive'

The GSA remains committed to our free postgraduate sport that is friendly, non membership based, and open to all genders.

'Anyone Can Play'

'Any Gender, Any Background'

Sports

The GSA remains committed to our free postgraduate sport that is friendly, non membership based, and open to all genders. It is designed to be casual and non-competitive, built around an ethos of 'anyone can play' and devised in consultation with Postgraduate students on what they want to see provided.

During the 2019/20 academic year, the sport provision included 7 free sports initially: Volleyball, Football, Badminton, Squash, Tennis, Netball and Basketball.

However, due to the Covid 19 pandemic the GSA quickly moved its provision online, first with in-house led events such as our Fitness with Clara, a session which ran frequently at the start of the Keep Home and Carry On campaign, and then a transition to online activities such as Online Yoga developed in partnership with York Sport.

These sessions were not just fitness sessions but also provided a space afterwards for participants to talk and relieve some of the isolation that came with the first national lockdown.





28

Events during
Welcome
Period

New
core events offer
of at least four
events weekly to
support student
wellbeing

Events

Trips

The GSA organised 7 trips over the 2019/20 academic year despite disruption from the Covid 19 pandemic. Almost all trips were increasingly popular and most sold out, with a need to provide more buses in order to cope with demand. Our locations for the 2019/20 academic year were...

Liverpool, Oxford, Glasgow, Manchester Christmas Market, Cambridge, Whitby and the Yorkshire Dales .



Welcome Back Week

This series of events provided students the chance to reconnect after the winter break, as well as giving students who start at the beginning of term 2 a reason to be excited and explore campus and the wider city.

The week consisted of 5 events, a mix of alcoholic and non-alcoholic events chosen due to their popularity during previous Welcome Week events. Students were enthusiastic about having a Postgraduate specific Welcome Back week.

Welcome Week

Welcome Week continues to grow in success with high attendance across all events during the week. All of the events ran smoothly with no major incidents and new additions such as the Escape Room provided more opportunities for non-drinking students.

A majority of students were thankful for there being a Postgraduate student Union as evidenced by our Welcome Week Report with 96% of students outlining how 'useful' Welcome Week was. It continues to provide one of the key ways for Postgraduate students to meet and make friends after arriving in a new city, and sometimes a new country.

Our Welcome Party continued to be our most well attended night time event, after our Welcome Talks and Information Fair.

Online Events

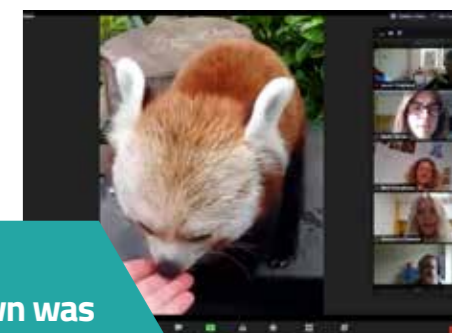
In early 2020 the UK went into a national lockdown as a response to the Covid 19 pandemic. The GSA quickly moved even before lockdown had been declared to our Keep Home and Carry on campaign, encouraging online activities and physical and mental wellbeing, alongside responsibility for following government guidance.

Following the campaign, the GSA continued to offer a series of online events including a weekly cinema club, weekly drop-in sessions with the sabbatical officers, a poetry night and a baking competition. The GSA Postgraduate Pub Quiz also went online and teams of postgrad students competed on Zoom for vouchers instead of nachos.

We continued to offer events throughout the summer, as for the students who came to the events they were a necessary and mentally beneficial space to socialise with now-distant friends and colleagues. Those who came to these events were often vocal about how grateful they were for the chance to do something different and to see other students.



After lockdown was imposed, the government lockdowns restricted trips, but we were still able to provide online outings, including our popular Zoom with a Zoo in coordination with Shepreth Wildlife Park.





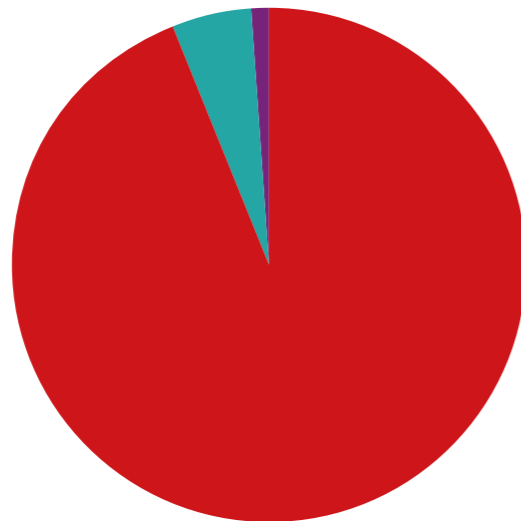
Finances

Financial Report

GSA this year delivered a slight surplus due mostly to not being able to hold on campus events and wider day trips due to lockdown restrictions. These funds were internally redirected towards a renewed focus on online provision to support the well-being of students especially those most isolated and vulnerable during lockdown.

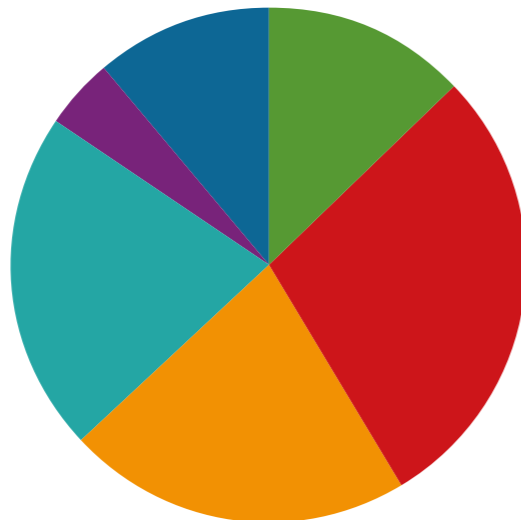
With a view to being financially prudent and ensuring we can provide a consistent level of provision, the GSA also signposted a portion of surplus funds generated to future business critical costs for the following financial year.

The GSA currently maintains six months of reserves to cover staff funding costs plus additional funds for contributing to the creation of a dedicated postgraduate social space. As an asset to both the University and students, we believe this can really add value to the student experience and remains an objective the GSA are committed to realizing, in keeping with ongoing student feedback.



Total Income
£292k

- University Grant
- Event Income
- Other Income



Total Expenditure
£253k

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

These are all based on draft figures.

CEO Report

CEO Report

2019/20 saw the world change dramatically of course with the Covid 19 epidemic having a huge impact on everyone since the first UK case was discovered in York.

Creating the best possible student experience in those circumstances and crucially supporting the wellbeing of all our postgraduate members was more important than ever and the primary focus of the GSA as the principal representative body for postgraduates at the University of York..

Being able to adapt and 'pivot' quickly to changing needs was essential. Amongst many new ideas that were created to support students at this time, the GSA were proud to bring everyone together quickly in establishing the 'Keep Home & Carry On' student welfare campaign: A health and wellbeing initiative led by our sabbatical team, the GSA provided a dependable 'go to' focused series of weekly online community activity and events covering a wide range of interests from physical activity, cooking, leisure activities, mindfulness, cinema, role play, family.

Designed to build student communities at a time of isolation, the campaign directly contributed to helping maintain students morale and adapt to a new 'normal'.

Collaboration was more important than ever before and our partnership working with YUSU ensured we complemented each other strategically across our respective provision and were able to crucially maintain what remains a high case work load for our respective advice services.

Providing students strong representation in what was a very challenging online environment the GSA were proud to maintain business as usual with the launch of what represented the University's first ever online elections. Seeing our elected officer team duly re-elected for a second term was complemented with the recruitment of a new Representation and Democracy Coordinator to the staff team. A review of the representation structure was subsequently carried out with a new increased part time officer and course representative structure designed.

Whilst the GSA remains a modest sized organisation with a core team of nine, we are proud to have been able to offer an agile and highly creative approach in adapting quickly to Covid and supporting postgraduates across all aspects of the student experience in what has been a volatile year. Building on a foundation of strong representation, the GSA hopes to do even more in the year to come as we look to help students transition out of 'lockdown life' and beyond.

Your dedicated Postgraduate Students' Union since 1965



**Contact us if you'd like to get involved with the GSA.
We'd love to hear from you.**

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