Faculty Reps

Handbook

2011

CUSU Cambridge University Students' Union

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

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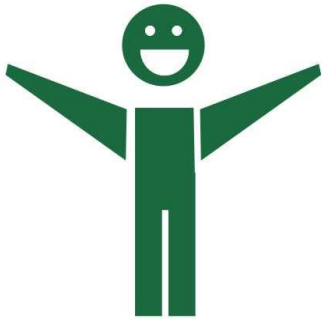
Hello



Welcome to the exciting world of student representation! Are you ready to make some real changes to the University of Cambridge, and get yourself and other students the best possible education? Excellent! Part of my job is to help you do just that.

As a former Faculty Rep myself, I can offer you some advice on your new role. This handbook is packed full of useful information to help you be the best representative ever. Please do use it! Meanwhile, here are some tips to start off with.

You can make a difference. Faculty Reps have been making changes here for years: from getting lecturers to put their notes online, to reshaping a whole Tripos, Faculty Reps get things done.

You're not on your own. The bi-weekly **Faculty Forums** are an excellent opportunity to meet reps in other faculties, share best practice and discuss ideas.

The Students' Union is here to help you.

Apart from the Faculty Forums I'll be running training events for you to learn how best to represent students. If you've got a question or have spotted something unusual in the agenda papers, drop me a line, and I'm also always happy to take you out for coffee to discuss any plans or questions you may have. I meet with very influential people in the university: keep me updated and I can help you! I'm also here if you have a query or a problem. Take this opportunity to get in touch!

There will be ups and downs. It's not all rosy: sometimes your points won't be taken on board, or the university will do something that the students do not want. If you have problems, come and see me and I'll help you out. On the other hand, the first time your faculty does something because you asked them to really makes you feel good!

Finally, make sure you keep your students in the loop! Ask them what they think. Tell them what's happening. Involve them in campaigns or petitions. You are your coursemates' representative: your voice carries the weight of their approval. Use it wisely.

Maria Helmling

Education Officer 2010-11
Cambridge University Students' Union

What Do Faculty Reps DO?

>> Ensure students in your faculty receive the best possible education.

Find the problems

Talk to your coursemates. What's bothering them about the course? What do they want changed? What do you think about your course? See the section on keeping students in the loop for ideas.

Get it sorted

This means attending committee meetings and telling staff there what the problems are. Work with them to find a solution. It's also worth asking other reps at the Faculty Forums for their advice. See the sections on talking to the University to find out how to get the most out of meetings. If you're having trouble, contact the Students' Union.

Let students know about it

If you've done good things for your coursemates, let them know! Communication works both ways, and it's always nice to know that what you say gets acted on. Don't forget to let students know you exist, even the ones who don't come to you for help – lecture shout-outs and emails are your friends. Nobody will come and talk to you if they don't know who you are!

Be on the ball

Keep up to date with changes in your faculty – are the changes good for students? Have the university consulted you and the other reps? Look out for wider university or national issues which may affect your students. Remember to let the University know about your concerns – they can't improve if you don't tell them what the problem is. Keep in touch with departmental reps or yeargroup reps if they exist in your faculty. Come to the Faculty Forums, meet with other faculty reps, and keep in touch with the Students' Union – an issue in your faculty could affect more students than you think.

Most importantly, remember why you're doing this

Don't get caught up in all the committees and bureaucracy. You've been elected to achieve **change**. It's important to remember that.

What's in It for You

The major benefit of being a representative is that you can improve University life for yourself and those you represent. In addition, you will gain some valuable skills and experience. In other words, here's some stuff to put on your CV…

- **Communication skills**
  From presenting information in meetings, to writing reports and emails, you'll learn a lot about putting your point across effectively. You'll also learn how to negotiate and listen listening in order to gain the fullest picture of a situation.

- **Networking skills**
  Reps make many contacts that can be extremely useful in both a representative and personal capacity. You may even get some useful references out of it!

- **Self-confidence and resilience**
  The University is an enormous bureaucracy with numerous layers of committees. Making greater changes takes time. Don't give up if your idea is brushed aside the first time. Take in what the objections are, and prepare doubly well the next time you bring it up.

- **Organisational skills**
  You will need to develop effective time management and organisational skills to make sure you can fit in your work and your commitments as a Faculty Rep.

- **Sense of achievement**
  Knowing you have made a positive change is extremely rewarding.

Go further

Faculty reps can also represent students at even higher levels in the University: on **CUSU Council** and on the **Council of your School** (a group of several faculties).

CUSU Council
CUSU Council is the governing body of the Students' Union, where student representatives decide what CUSU's priorities are, what stance it should take on certain issues, and what campaigns it should run. Each faculty holds a vote at CUSU Council – use it! CUSU Council meets every two weeks during term time, usually on Mondays at 7.15pm. For details check http://www.cusu.cam.ac.uk/union/council/

School Reps

For each of the six Schools in the University Faculty Reps elect one UG and one PG School Rep at the beginning of Lent Term. Keep your School Reps up to date with what's going on in your faculty and discuss with them your ideas for change. School Reps can voice students' concerns at a higher level and effect change in several faculties at once. Being a member of a School Council can give you a really good insight into how the University works, especially since the Chairman of the Council often meets with student reps beforehand to discuss the upcoming issues.

How to Achieve Change

1) Keep students in the loop

Make yourself known to your electorate, tell them what you are doing, and ask them for their feedback, their comments and ideas. You might want to think about some of the following methods:

- Send out an email introducing yourself personally as well as what you do in your capacity as faculty rep.
- Wear your stash so students recognise you and can approach you easily.
- Do lecture shout-outs.
- Celebrate your successes! No matter how big or small, celebrate your wins with the other students.
- Think of additional communication channels: Subject Societies, subject-related events, department reps/ course reps/ year reps, school reps
- Catching students: attract them with free things – free drinks, free snacks, arrange prize draws for survey, make things FUN, arrange socials, garden parties, pub visits
- Do a formal survey – a very good and free survey tool is on www.qualtrics.com, but there is also one on CamTools. Contact the CUSU Education Officer for help in setting one up.
- Use surveys that others have done for you! The **National Student Survey (NSS)** will be a very valuable tool for you with which you can back up your arguments – so keep it in your backpocket! If there are issues you are already asking the Faculty to act on, can you use NSS responses to strengthen your case?

The National Student Survey (NSS) is a survey which measures student satisfaction at across the country, and it is completed by finalists. This enables you to compare not only the University as a whole with other institutions, but also individual courses.

2) Find out what students think

- Talk to students from different courses/ papers, year groups, colleges
- Ask for comment – via email, comment box, notice board
- Arrange an Open Meeting

ASK for comments

TALK to students

3) Link up with others

The Faculty Forum

Your Key Network

The Faculty Forum is a student-led forum and **your key network** as Faculty Rep. This is where you meet other Faculty Reps, discuss the issues that concern you in your faculty, and find out how things work in other faculties. It's a great opportunity to gain advice on your plans and test out new ideas. Together with other reps you can share best practice, and coordinate campaigns.

Fun!

The Faculty Forum is also a great deal of fun, and a social environment where you'll quickly make friends. Often the Faculty Forums are followed by going to a pub, and there's always a Faculty Forum Formal at the end of term.

Themed

Usually, each Forum is dedicated to a certain topic which is of particular concern at that time, for example how to engage students, improving academic feedback, making the handover process successful, or how to encourage students to stand for a Faculty Rep position. There is always time, however, for you to bring up your own questions.

Join in!

Now you know what it's about, join in! The Faculty Forums tend to take place every other Thursday evening during term time. For a list of topics and details of dates and venue, contact the CUSU Education Officer or the Undergraduate or Postgraduate Faculties Academic Officer on the CUSU Education Team.

School Reps

It's a good idea to keep in close contact with your School Rep. She/he will gain an insight into what'd going on in each Faculty and can campaign on your behalf at a higher level.

Year Reps/ Department Reps

If there are yeargroup reps or department reps, make sure you meet with them regularly and update each other on how plans are progressing, who allies could be, and what likely counterarguments would be.

4) Campaign for Change

Before you wield banners and write petitions, make sure you've checked the following:

✓ **Is the issue widely felt?**
Does it concern more students than just your best friends? Talk to the wider student body, invite comments, do a survey. Committees are easily impressed by statistics!

✓ **Is the issue deeply felt?**
Do students really feel this is an important issue?

✓ **Is the issue winnable?**
Can you propose a realistic, concrete solution to the issue? What is the timescale?

✓ **What are the resource implications?**
What are the costs likely to be? Finance is almost always a very hard argument.

5) Go further: Higher-Level Committees

CUSU Council

CUSU's policy is made at CUSU Council, which is made up of JCR/MCR Presidents and External Officers from colleges, the CUSU Executive and Faculty Reps – YOU! This policy determines what CUSU's priorities are, in which way the sabbatical officers are going to argue a case at the various University and College Committees, what campaigns CUSU is going to run and how money is spent.

Council meets four times a term (two or three in Easter Term).

CUSU Council is useful to Faculty Reps because it is the place to exert the students' influence over an issue at a higher level. Most issues that are raised at Council affect either all or a great variety of students, not just of one College or faculty.

University and College Committees

Sometimes the Faculty Board of even School Council does not have the authority to decide over certain matters. It may be necessary that Colleges or other University committees get involved. For advice on how to take your concerns further, contact one of the CUSU sabbatical officers, as between them they sit on almost all University and College committees!

6) Talking to the University

Formal Committees

You are the voice of "student opinion". University staff may ask you "what do students think of X?", or you may have a burning issue you wish to take to the University. As a representative, you are in an ideal place to do this.

You can simply respond to what's on the agenda for each meeting, but you can also submit papers and agenda points yourself (via the Secretary). If you are preparing a paper, have in mind how the argument is going to be won, and work out how you are going to speak to it, as the Chairman will always ask you to introdue your paper. For example, a good idea is to produce some evidence that there is a large amount of student feeling on a particular issue (a questionnaire response, for instance), or it is something that is happened in every other Faculty except yours, or CUSU has told you that such a proposal was agreed at a central committee last year, and should have been implemented...

Most Faculty Board agendas routinely include an agenda point like "Staff Student Committee" where you can bring up issues more informally and update the rest of the board with what you have been doing. If you anticipate a discussion, always submit a paper in which you present your arguments coherently.

Sometimes you may not know what people think or know enough about a particular issue. It is easy to (either) make something up, or to simply say you do not know and leave it there. **BUT**... it is always best to be honest, admit you do not know, and to go away, research the issue, and get back to them later. There is a great deal of support available to help you in this. Ask Maria Helmling, the Education Officer, if you're unsure about something or want someone to read over a paper you want to submit.

Transfer all of these dates into your diary (now!) because missing meetings not only reflects badly upon you, but also upon students representatives in general.

If you want to find out more about a paper in the agenda pack, you may want to email its author with questions before the meeting. If you can show that you've done your work, you'll be taken more seriously.

Apart from submitting a paper, there are a number of different ways to **contribute to a meeting**:

1. ***In an emergency*** matters can be raised under **"Any Other Business" (AOB)**. However, people don't like making decisions on the spot, and like to be informed through consultation with others before a meeting. There is a tendency for things to be badly received in AOB, and often indicates being underprepared or disorganised. They'll also probably be shuffling their papers and getting ready to leave at this point - avoid being an irritant to their daily schedules! It is 99 times out of a 100 better to hold off until the next meeting, unless the matter really can't wait.

2. If something was discussed at the previous meeting and isn't on the agenda of the current meeting, raise it under **"Matters arising (from the minutes)"**. However, raising a point under "Matters arising" which is due for discussion later on the agenda will show that you haven't read the agenda properly.

3. **Preparation is key** to a good contribution in the meeting itself. First, skim-read agenda papers for relevance. People may try to be sneaky and smother important information in a mass of irrelevant detail, so be on your guard.

4. On items you feel you want to speak on, a **thorough read** of the papers is essential. If you try to talk on a subject without the relevant back-up, or you ask a question that has been answered in the committee papers you're only going to look silly, and devalue the good points you had to make. However, don't be afraid to ask what you might think is a trivial question, often you will find there is more value than you first thought in it.

5. **Influencing decisions** is a very wide area; learning how you can do this is critical and you will pick up ideas as you experience the committees. But is worth also being aware of how others use influence. For example, a chair or secretary of a committee may influence decisions by the way the agenda is set out, the order of business, what is carried over for the next meeting, etc.

If you **cannot attend a meeting**, you should contact the secretary of the committee as early as possible to apologise for absence. You will see this written as "apologies" on the minutes of the meeting.

Informal Discussion – Making Allies

Before you raise a big issue at a committee, get in touch with the secretary to find out whether it has been discussed before and what the outcome has been. Secretaries are possibly your most important allies! They know everyone, usually have a good sense of how a discussion will go, and can give you overviews of previous discussions.

If you want to bring up an issue you expect will be controversial, it is always a good idea to informally meet with some key people before you raise it at the formal committee meeting. Through an informal discussion you can try out your arguments and get a sense of reactions and possible objections. And it may boost your confidence to know you've got an ally in the room. Conversely, don't give up if reactions are little sympathetic and you still feel the issue is important – but prepare doubly well to counter objections.

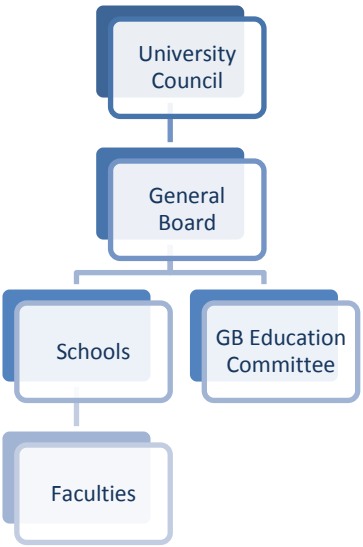
At the meeting:

- Sit where the chair can see you at meetings.If you agree with something, say so. Avoid speaking only to criticise.
- Don't talk too much though. Speak when you have something valuable to say.
- Make sure you and your fellow student reps know what views you are going to present. It looks bad when student reps disagreeing on what students think.
- Don't be intimidated. You have as much right as the most senior person to be there and to say what you think.

University Structure

University Council

The Council is the principal policy-making body of the University. It has overall responsibility for the administration of the University, for defining its mission, for planning its work, and for the management of its resources. The Council deals with relations between the University and the Colleges, conducts negotiations with outside bodies on many matters (other than those relating directly to the educational and research programme of the University, which are dealt with by the General Board). It is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor and has three student members (one of whom must be a graduate student) who have full voting rights. The Council also has a number of sub-committees on which the student members may also sit, such as the Planning and Resources Committee and the Resource Management Committee.



The student members on Council are: Rahul Mansigani (CUSU President), Sam Wakeford, and Tony Andrews (graduate), all of whom can be contacted via CUSU.

General Board (of the Faculties)

This is where everything related to education is discussed. The principal duty of the General Board (as it is usually abbreviated) is to advise the University on educational policy and to control the resources necessary for the proper implementation of that policy. It is responsible for maintaining a high standard of teaching and research, and for ensuring that University teaching officers satisfactorily perform their duties and fulfil their conditions of appointment. It is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor and has two student members (one of whom is a graduate student) who have full voting rights.

The student members on General Board are: Maria Helmling (CUSU Education Officer) and Joshua Ward (graduate), both of whom can be contacted via CUSU.

General Board Education Committee

This is where most of the productive business involving education policy such as course changes and policies relevant to students at a University level are instigated. It is a sub-committee of the General Board. Chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education), John Rallison, the CUSU Education Officer sits on the committee ex-officio.
The student member of the General Board's Education Committee is: Maria Helmling

Councils of Schools

A School is a group of faculties or departments. There are six schools: Arts & Humanities, Humanities & Social Sciences, Biological Sciences, Physical Sciences, Clinical Medicine and Technology. Structurally, the School sits between the General Board (GB) and the faculties themselves. One of it roles is to allocated resources (and more often to decide where to cut) and to approve course programmes. There is one undergraduate and one graduate rep for each School, who is elected by all Faculty Reps of that School early on in Lent Term.

Faculty Boards

There are 23 Faculty Boards across the University, as well as Departmental Committees and Syndicates. There are usually three student members on each Faculty Board (apart from Veterinary Medicine where this are only two).

The student members on Faculty Boards are: YOU! (The full list is printed on a separate sheet.)

The Board of Graduate Studies

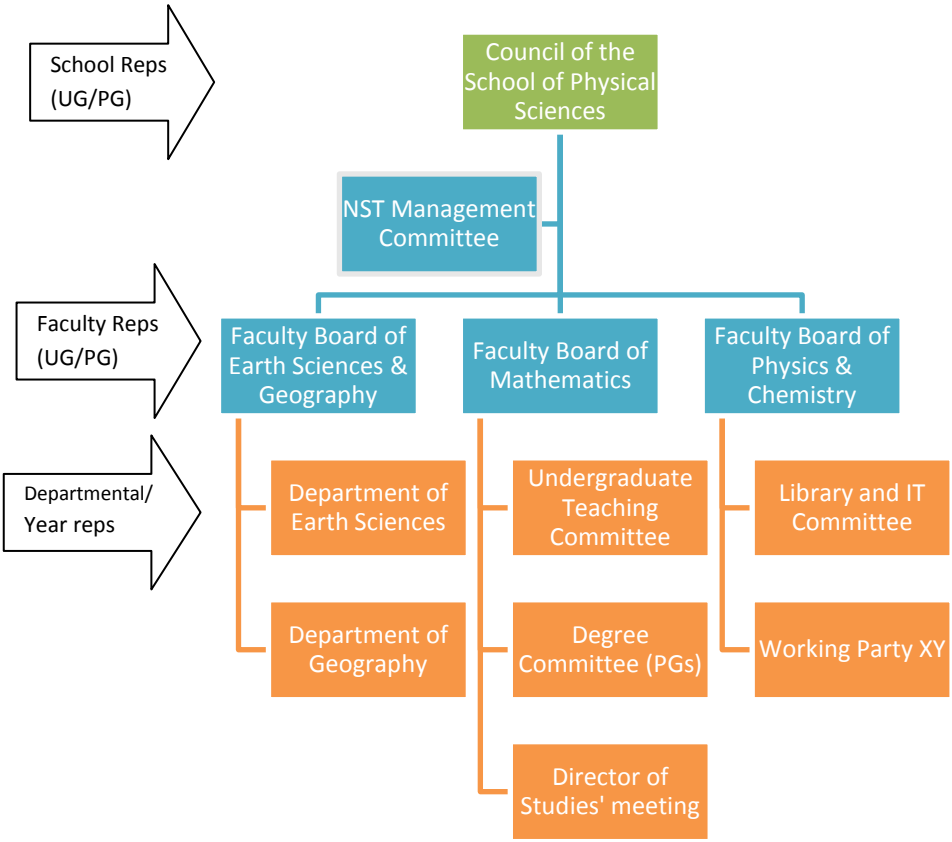
This has overall responsibility for the vast majority of postgraduate study (exceptions are MEng courses and PGCEs, to name but two). The graduate student on General Board as well as the Graduate Union President sit on the Board of Graduate Studies.

The student members on the Board of Graduate Studies are: Joshua Ward and Amina Rai (GU President), both of whom can be contacted via CUSU or the GU.

Other Committees that are worth knowing about:

- **Colleges' Committee:** The Masters (or equivalent) of every college.
- **Senior Tutors' Committee:** A very powerful committee chaired by the Vice-Chancellor and one which is highly regarded by the University, and is instrumental in determining collegiate policy towards a number of issues, including educational matters. Funnily enough, it consists of all the Senior Tutors. **Student Members: Rahul Mansigani (CUSU President) and Amina Rai (GU President).**
- **Senior Tutors' Standing Committee on Education:** The sub-committee of the Senior Tutors' Committee responsible for educational issues. **Student Members: Maria Helmling (CUSU Education Officer) and Morgan Wild (CUSU/GU Student Support Officer).**
- **Bursars' Committee:** The committee which isn't actually a committee. Apparently, it doesn't officially exist and therefore CUSU cannot have representation on it. The Bursars' Committee has the ability to control funding to projects that require money from collegiate sources, and as such hold a vast amount of power. CUSU is lobbying for formal representation on the committee.
- **Undergraduate Admissions Committee/Admissions Forum:** These are committees that primarily consist of admissions tutors, which consider, amongst other matters, how access initiatives can be improved, and admissions generally. **Student Member: Andy McGowan (CUSU Access Officer)**

Schematic Overview of a School



Remember: Between them, student representatives have access to almost every committee in the University. If you're unsure which committees you sit on, ask.

Sources of Support

CUSU

CUSU (Cambridge University Students' Union) exists to represent you, to campaign with you, to inform you and to support you. The six sabbatical officers are elected by all students of the University, and there are various teams and autonomous campaigns that deal with specific issues.

Support: The Education Officer, one of the six sabbatical officers, is working full-time for the improvement of the educational experience at Cambridge. You can find her in the CUSU Office on New Museums Site most of the time every weekday (and increasingly in the evenings and weekends, too!). She'll be more than happy to do the research to back up your arguments, to explain University Committee structures to you or to put you in touch with thre relevant people.

YOU are my priority – take this opportunity to get in touch.

Training: CUSU puts on various training sessions for Faculty Reps, for example the Committee Skills training session, often in conjunction with senior members of the University to help you in your role, as well as providing you useful skills and training for your future careers.

Information: The Education Officer is likely to know lots of background information (and if not, will know people who will do) that may be helpful to you in your role. They will be able to either point you in the right direction or give you that information to take the issue on yourself within your Faculty (with appropriate assistance as required and mentioned above if wanted).

Representation: All the CUSU Sabbatical Officer sit on University and College Committees dealing with a range of issues: education in both the University and the Colleges, welfare, finance, admissions, access, resources and much more.

Services: CUSU provides a large number of services that may come in useful:

- Photocopying – A3, A4, Black & White, Colour, double-sided, booklets and much more….
- A laminator – great to make your posters look more shiny.
- Desktop Publishing Services – If you want to design a poster or a leaflet (contact services@cusu.cam.ac.uk for more information).
- CUSU Mail Service – Send mail to up to 50 people a day between colleges for free.

Faculty Secretaries

Faculty Secretaries know everything, everyone, and are usually very organised! Make sure they become your best friends. They can let you know whether certain issues have been raised before, and will often be able to put you in touch with the right people. They are also usually in charge of Faculty Rep elections.

Abbreviations & Acronyms

AAO	*Academic Affairs Officer*
BoGS	*Board of Graduate Studies*
CTO	*College Teaching Officer*: A teaching officer employed wholly by a College
FTE	*Full time Equivalent*: This term is used when calculating how many students (for the purposes of funding) there are at the University to include part-time students
GB	*General Board*
GU	*Graduate Union*
HEFCE	*Higher Education Funding Council for England*: This body which distributes government funding to universities.
HEI	*Higher Education Institution*
HESA	*Higher Education Statistics Agency*
LEA	*Local Education Authority*
LTR	*Learning and Teaching Review*
LTS	*Learning & Teaching Strategy*
NSS	*National Student Survey*
NUS	*National Union of Students*
PG	*Postgraduate*
PVC	*Pro-Vice-Chancellor*: Essentially a deputy Vice-Chancellor with a specific area of responsibility (e.g. Education or Reasearch)
QAA	*Quality Assurance Agency:* The body in charge of reviewing quality and standards of the University.
SSR	*Staff-student ratio*
STC	*Senior Tutors' Committee*
THE	*Times Higher Education.* Formerly THES (Times Higher Education Supplement)
UCAS	*University and Colleges Admissions Service*: The national system which deals with the applications for entry to the University
UCU	*University & College Union:* The main union for academic staff
UG	*Undergraduate*
UKCISA	*United Kingdom Council for International Student Affairs*
UTO	*University Teaching Officer*: Someone employed permanently by the University, including Lecturers, Readers and Professors

My Next Steps

- attend the next Faculty Forum
- arrange a meeting with the CUSU Education Officer
- meet the other reps in my faculty
- get in touch with my School Rep
- order my Faculty Reps stash
- introduce myself to the students in my faculty
- make friends with key people in my faculty

My Key Contacts

ASK for support

CUSU (Cambridge University Students' Union)

Old Exams Hall, New Museums Site, Cambridge CB2 3RF; phone: 01223 333 313
www.cusu.cam.ac.uk

CUSU Education Officer: Maria Helmling, *education@cusu.cam.ac.uk*, 01223 7 616 93

The CUSU Education Team (head by the Education Officer)

- CUSU Undergraduate Faculty Academic Officer: Sam Ruiz, *ug-faculties@cusu.cam.ac.uk*
- CUSU Undergraduate College Academic Officer: Tim Waters, *ug-colleges@cusu.cam.ac.uk*
- CUSU Graduate Faculty Academic Officer *grad-faculties@cusu.cam.ac.uk*

Student Advice Service

CUSU and the GU employ a full time, professional Student Advisor, Lisa Dery, and four trained student support officers also provide confidential support and representation.

- Email *advice@camstudentadvice.co.uk*, phone 01223 746999, or drop into either the CUSU or GU offices.

Education Section

The Education Section coordinates the Learning and Teaching Support good practice initiative (LTS). Their database of ideas and examples of good practice are a valuable tool for any Faculty Rep.

- Head of the Education Section: Alice Benton, *alice.benton@admin.cam.ac.uk*
- www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/education/

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