

2266 It's More than Just a Space: Use of the Graduate Centre

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Seconder: Lewis Martin (Mature Students Officer)

Union Notes:

1. The Graduate Centre in Union House comprises of the Scholars Bar, Scholars Lounge, Bookable Rooms 7 & 8, and the Graduate Kitchen.
2. In the academic year 2017/18 there were 16,262 undergraduate, 2,766 postgraduate taught, and 1,138 postgraduate research students.¹
3. The Graduate Centre is the only dedicated space on campus for all postgraduates.
4. The Scholars Bar used to be the Graduate Bar before the Graduate Student Associate (GSA) was dissolved and the space absorbed into the Union.
5. The current dedicated desk space for PGR students sits at a ratio of 1:3, meaning that the majority of PhD students have to hot desk and do not have a permanent space to write-up their research.
6. Research Community Culture continues to receive a low score in the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey, with many students referencing little opportunity to meet other PhD students outside their office, or from different Graduate Schools.
7. The average age of a PhD student at UEA is 30, whereas 70% of undergraduates at UEA are under 20 years old.²
8. UEA Students' Union recognises 'mature' students as anyone over the age of 21 on starting their degree.
9. The non-continuation rate for full-time mature UK-domiciled students was 11.3% in 2014-15, compared with 6.3% for non-mature students.³

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<https://portal.uea.ac.uk/documents/6207125/7112761/Facts+and+Figures+External+Report+1718.pdf/0be6af61-9281-9450-40b1-fe949d0962b8> Pages 2-4

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<https://portal.uea.ac.uk/documents/6207125/7112761/Facts+and+Figures+External+Report+1718.pdf/0be6af61-9281-9450-40b1-fe949d0962b8> Page 11

³ <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/HEinEngland/students/age/>

10. Many PhD students at UEA hold contracts as Associate Tutors delivering teaching, marking, supervision, and lab demonstrations to undergraduates.
11. A survey conducted by the Students' Union in 2016/17 found that Undergraduates accounted for 32% of occupants in the Graduate Centre, but only 17% of sales behind the bar.
12. The University of East Anglia has expanded both Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught student numbers rapidly in the last 3 years and intends to continue this increase.
13. Postgraduate Taught (PGT) and Postgraduate Research (PGR) students serve a 12 month academic year and are therefore often on campus all year round.
14. A 2018 Students' Union survey of 172 mature and Postgraduate students found:
 - a. 82% of respondents wanted the Graduate Centre to be exclusively reserved and Undergraduates not allowed into the space.
 - b. 15.1% of respondents wanted the Graduate Centre exclusively reserved for postgraduate and mature students during peak hours.
 - c. Only 2.9% of respondents wanted access open to all students.
 - d. The survey also found that the most popular measure to control access to the Graduate Centre was to introduce swipe access on the doors.

Union Believes:

1. The expansion of predominantly undergraduate students on campus without capital development has led to an increased pressure on social study space for all students.
2. The Union has not done enough to date to protect the Graduate Centre since the dissolution of the GSA, and has failed in its responsibility to reserve the space for postgraduate and mature students.
3. The Graduate Centre is an important component in creating a sense of research community culture on campus.
4. The Graduate Centre provides an informal environment for PhD students who teach to liaise with other academics from their school and feel integrated into the teaching community.

5. Many Postgraduate and mature students do not feel comfortable in undergraduate-dominated areas due to the large difference in age, and sometimes life-style.
6. As they make up a minority of the student population, it can be difficult to meet other PGR or mature students on campus, adding to a sense of isolation in these student groups.
7. Having a dedicated space can help foster a sense of belonging for mature students, which may help retention rates.
8. PhD students who teach need a dedicated space where they can relax outside of their work environment, and not feel at risk of being surrounded by the students they teach.
9. The Graduate Centre provides a vital service for this group of students, who otherwise hold little affinity with Students Union. The Scholars bar therefore should not be run for profit, but instead should be run as community service.
10. That the Graduate Centre should only be run by the Union as a service specific to postgraduate and mature students, and that events can not be held in this space that are not explicitly for these student groups.
11. That an honesty system has not prevented undergraduates from using the space and more effective measures need to be put in place to restrict who can access the Graduate Centre.
12. That restricting access to the Graduate Centre to those age 21 and above is the simplest and most inclusive approach to protecting the space. This will allow Postgraduate students, mature students, and university staff to maintain access.
13. Previous measures have been tested to reduce the number of Undergraduates using the space, including increased signage and campus card checks at peak times. Campus card checks have proved difficult to enforce when the Centre is busy.

Union Resolves:

1. To mandate the Postgraduate Education Officer, and Mature Students Officer, to write a Graduate Centre usage policy in conjunction with the Graduate Centre Management Group.
2. That the content of this policy will be led by the content of this motion.
3. That this policy will also be recognised by the Trustee Board.
4. Swipe card readers to control access to the Graduate Centre must be implemented immediately. The Graduate Centre Management Group should explore the practicalities of this.

5. That access will be exclusively restricted to members of UEA who are 21 and over.
6. That the Graduate Centre will only be used for events that are explicitly for postgraduate or mature students.
7. That the running of Scholar's bar is not to be profit-driven, but instead run as a community service for Postgraduate and mature students.
8. The Student Officer Committee will continue to lobby the university to resolve the critical lack of social study space for undergraduate students.