

What is CUSU?

CUSU is the university-wide students' union for the University of Cambridge. All students recognised by the University are automatically part of CUSU, totalling over 21,000 members. CUSU is a democratic organisation, meaning that every one of these members has the right to be involved in shaping and influencing the work that CUSU does.

CUSU's core objectives are:

- To advance the education of its members
- To provide services and resources which improve students' experiences while studying at Cambridge
- To promote equal opportunity of access to the University, particularly for those from backgrounds underrepresented in the University
- To represent student interests to the University, Colleges, local and national government, and others

CUSU is very different from a regular student club or society, not least because its role is enshrined in British law (e.g. by the Education Act of 1994) and the Statutes which govern the University. While CUSU is integrated into University governance, and obviously works very closely with the University and Colleges on student matters, it is a legally independent charity with its own set of charitable objects and democratic structures. CUSU is also subject to significant scrutiny, both by the University and the Charities Commission, to ensure that it is acting in accordance with the law and its core objectives.

How does CUSU work?

CUSU is student-led which means that students set the organisation's agenda and take a lead in every area of work it undertakes. There are 3 main parts to CUSU's democratic structures:

1) CUSU Council

Council determines CUSU policy and tells CUSU Officers what they should be doing. Any student can bring a motion to Council and reps will debate, edit and vote on the motion to decide if it should become CUSU policy. Council is made up of student reps from outside CUSU - they come from your JCRs, MCRs and faculties. The vast majority of CUSU reps (like the President, Education Officer, etc) DON'T get a vote. This is important because it means that decisions about CUSU policy aren't just made by some 'in-crowd' of CUSU Officers, and as a result the decisions that are made are much more representative of the general student body. The only exception is for CUSU representatives for minority/marginalised groups such as LGBT+ students or student parents, because CUSU believes it is important that these students' voices are part of any decision that is made.

2) The Exec

The Exec are CUSU Officers, elected by the student body, who implement CUSU Policy and act as lead representatives to the University and Colleges. This includes sabbatical officers (students who take a year during or following their course to work full-time as a student representative) and part-time officers (current students who volunteer with CUSU alongside their degree). The Exec uses networks of JCR, MCR and faculty reps, surveys results and student consultation to guide their representative work and inform discussions with the University and Colleges.

3) The Autonomous Campaigns

The five CUSU Autonomous Campaigns represent students from groups which have historically been marginalised in the University/wider society. The campaigns are:

- The CUSU Womens' Campaign
- The CUSU LGBT+ Campaign
- The CUSU Black and Minority Ethnic Campaign
- The CUSU Disabled Students' Campaign
- iCUSU - The CUSU International Students' Campaign

Autonomous campaigns are politically autonomous from the central CUSU organisation, but are provided with financial and other resources to support their representative work. Representatives for these campaigns are elected from and by students who fall within these marginalised groups and they are able to set their own policy and direction. This ensures that the voices of students from these groups cannot be overridden by majority votes by CUSU Council and that CUSU is able to empower students who may historically have been marginalised in the University community to campaign on the issues which matter most to them.

CUSU Affiliation – the key points

CUSU is designed to support and complement the work of your college representatives by working with them to identify and address students' needs. It might not always be as visible as your JCR, but that doesn't mean it isn't doing vital work to improve your student experience. A central students' union like CUSU isn't a novelty; it has a position in British law and is enshrined in University Statutes. This gives CUSU a unique position in the University to represent student interests - something a JCR or MCR would never be able to gain in isolation - and makes it worth investing a bit of time and effort to improve it, rather than just abandoning ship.

Of course CUSU has problems - your CUSU officers could probably list more of them than most students - but they are only going to be solved if students take some responsibility for their union, rather than leaving it to (well-intentioned, but fallible) sabbatical officers to do all the work. If they properly engage with CUSU, whether by volunteering, contributing to policy discussions, or simply taking part in surveys and elections, every student has the ability to shape what their students' union does. Rather than working to solve the problems CUSU has, disaffiliation would simply mean that your reps don't bother to take part. You would be choosing to abdicate responsibility for something which *should* be a collective effort: representing the entire student body.

If your worries are financial, know that CUSU doesn't want to charge affiliation fees and is actively working to have them abolished and replaced with a new income stream to support CUSU's work. If it wasn't going to damage CUSU's ability to represent and support students centrally, CUSU reps would much rather that affiliation money be spent by your officers in your college. Unfortunately, the University currently invests more in cleaning its windows or emptying its bins than ensuring its 21,000 student members are properly represented University decisions. Cambridge, the richest university in Europe, spends less on its central students' union than any other Russell Group university, meaning that affiliation fees remain a vital financial resource for CUSU, without which it could not properly function.

Ultimately, affiliation isn't a service agreement with your JCR; affiliation fees were never intended to function in that way. This isn't about how much condoms cost or how many hours of training you could get with your fees. Affiliation is really about acknowledging that there are issues outside of your college which will impact students in your community - whether it's your course, your funding or an intercollegiate policy that you are on the wrong side of - which might require a joined-up approach and some centralised resources to address. It's about realising that winning arguments against the University or Colleges will often take a level of research and effort that current students will struggle to make time for without the professional support that CUSU can offer. And make no mistake, CUSU does win those arguments and create real and lasting change that benefits students throughout this institution.

If you have any questions or want more information, please email president@cusu.cam.ac.uk - I'm always happy to talk to you about the work CUSU does and how we can improve it.

What is affiliation?

Affiliation is about being part of CUSU's democratic structures; affiliated JCRs and MCRs get votes on CUSU Council and access to the networks that CUSU uses to develop policy and distribute resources for work in the colleges. CUSU also supports the work of affiliated JCRs and MCRs in their colleges through training, resources and services but this is secondary - CUSU is primarily structured to support and represent students, not to provide services to JCRs and MCRs and if that was how CUSU focused all of its work, it would be wrong.

Importantly, CUSU Council decides how CUSU budgets its money - around \$850,000 per year. Affiliated colleges can vote to ensure that money is being spent in the interests of their members and furthering the work that their committee is already engaged in. In this way, CUSU affiliation can help JCRs and MCRs make more out of the budgets they are given, even if that doesn't come across in tangible services. Again, with the exception of those representing minority/marginalised student groups, CUSU officers and sabbs don't get a vote in this decision, so JCRs, MCRs and faculties really do have the power to decide how CUSU's resources are used.

Why does CUSU charge fees for affiliation?

CUSU is underfunded and under-resourced compared to every other university-wide students' union in the country. The average block grant for a university-wide students' union (that is the money provided by their University which they can freely choose how to spend) is £1.5 million. CUSU's is a little over £2,000. This might sound like a lot, but effective professional student representation, support and services for over 20,000 people require significant resources. CUSU understands that JCRs and MCRs collectively receive more institutional funding than CUSU, allowing them to spend far more per student than would be possible for CUSU.

CUSU does get some money from the University for projects they want to see students working on, such as CUSU access work which helps meet the University's widening participation obligations, but vital projects such as addressing sexual violence or campaigning for tutor training would have no hope of receiving this sort of restricted funding. In addition, CUSU isn't provided with a students' union building like you would see at other Universities, where commercial enterprises such as student shops and bars could help to raise funds for the union, further limiting CUSU's financial capacity. CUSU does use the money it gets effectively, raising well over £250k each year through commercial activities which means there is more to spend on students. However, this income can fluctuate significantly year-to-year and dependence on this source risks giving CUSU the wrong incentive - prioritising making money over representing students' interests.

In the absence of proper institutional funding from the University and Colleges that would support the CUSU representation written into THEIR governance structures, CUSU has been forced to charge affiliation fees to JCRs and MCRs who do benefit from some degree of institutional support via their budgets. This funding (amounting to around £100k in total) is vital to CUSU's work as it helps to pay for sabbatical officers to represent students at every level of the University's decision-making structures, provides funding for the CUSU-GU Student Advice Service which supports hundreds of students each year and provides resources for the campaigns which your reps on Council tell CUSU it should be working on.

CUSU doesn't want to charge affiliation fees. In fact it has frozen fees for several years so that JCRs and MCRs are now paying less in real terms than they used to. CUSU has petitioned the University for years to provide adequate funding for the central students' union so that JCRs and MCRs can have more to spend in their college communities. While it is hopeful that this will change in the future (particularly as the University of Oxford recently granted its students' union a block grant worth over half a million pounds, in part to eliminate affiliation fees), the current funding situation means that CUSU would struggle to properly represent student interests without the invaluable resources provided by affiliation fees.

What has CUSU done for students in the past year?

With 6 full-time sabbatical officers, student volunteers and a team of support staff, it would be difficult to list everything CUSU has been doing for students in the past year. Here are a few highlights:

Held the CUSU Freshers' Festival - CUSU kicked off Michaelmas by hosting over 400 student societies looking for new members and more than 15,000 people at our annual societies fair. There were hundreds of projects to sign up for, freebies galore, live performances and if you were lucky you managed to snag some free Nandos out on Parker's Piece!

Organised the country's largest student-led access initiative - The CUSU Shadowing Scheme takes up a big chunk of the CUSU team's work during Lent term, with more than 400 sixth formers from backgrounds which are under-represented in the University coming to the city to experience what life is like for a Cambridge student. The Shadowing Scheme has been running for years now and shows continued success in raising students' aspirations about studying at university and breaking down misconceptions about Cambridge which might put people off from applying.

Supported hundreds of students through the Student Advice Service - The CUSU-GU Student Advice Service offers free, confidential and independent advice and support to any student at the University on issues such as intermission, exam failure, mental health, etc. The advice team includes professional advisors, along with sabbatical officers who have undergone extensive training to ensure they have appropriate expertise in University and College regulations and resources available to students

Got Tutor Training implemented - Until this year, tutors have never had access to comprehensive specialist training for their role. This meant that the quality of pastoral support varied massively across the tutorial system and over and over student were being let down by the people who were meant to support them. CUSU campaigned for change and spent the last year working with Senior Tutors, the University Counselling Service and the Disability Resource Centre to develop a training programme for tutors. The first all-day training was held in October and CUSU continues to work on the development of training and resources to help tutors perform better in their pastoral roles.

Fought cuts to the Disabled Students Allowance (and won!) - CUSU worked with our local MP to fight proposed cuts to the DSA which would have affected hundreds of disabled students at the University. Eventually he brought the DSA debate to parliament and CUSU sabbs were in the room as the Universities Minister was grilled on the issue. By working with NUS and student reps from across the country, we managed to get the cuts delayed for at least a year and will continue to fight for the plans to be scrapped entirely!

Represented student interests during 100s of hours of University and College committees - Sometimes the most boring part of the job, but also one of the most important, CUSU's work on committees ensures that student interests are represented at every level of decision-making in the University. From improving your course content to changing the structure of Cambridge terms, committees are where real change gets made in the University and CUSU makes sure students are always part of the discussion.

Campaigned for all University staff to be paid the Living Wage - Students have consistently asked CUSU to campaign for all staff who support our student experience at the institution to be paid a fair wage. This summer, following years of campaigning, the University began to pay all staff the Living Wage. CUSU is continuing to push for this policy to be adopted in the Colleges and for 3rd parties contracted by the University.

Brought consent and relationship education to your colleges - Freshers' Week this year saw the roll-out of CUSU's consent workshops for new students which encouraged new students to talk and learn about issues of sexual consent. These workshops are just one part of the work CUSU is doing, along with the university and Colleges to address the prevalence of sexual harassment and sexual violence in the University, as evidenced by the Cambridge Speaks Out report released by the CUSU Women's Campaign last year.

Secured free sexual health provision for all students, at no cost to JCRs and MCRs - CUSU negotiated £8500 of annual funding to resource a University-wide sexual health scheme that provides students access to free sexual health supplies and information, saving JCRs and MCRs thousands of pounds each year.

Introduced an annual training Conference for JCR, MCR and faculty reps - Knowing that student reps are far more effective if they are trained well, CUSU launched its first training conference in 2014, followed up by a second this year. Conference is designed to provide student officers with the knowledge and skills they will need to really excel in representative roles and enable them to do more for you at a college or faculty level.

What would individuals lose if their JCR disaffiliated?

In the event of disaffiliation, **individual students in the college would continue to be members of CUSU and so would not lose individual rights or benefits associated with CUSU membership** - this is protected by law and is not something that CUSU would ever wish to take away from its members. **Students may miss out on some services or opportunities** that are currently provided as a result of CUSU support for the JCR, or experience **a reduction in quality of services and representation from their JCR committee** due to a lack of training or ongoing support from CUSU. The loss of affiliation fee income may also lead to **a reduction in the overall service able to be offered by CUSU to all students in the University** - for example professional staff support for the Student Advice Service may have to be reduced or campaigns budgets for exec teams may need to be cut. While some loss of affiliation fee income might be able to be absorbed, the knock on effect of multiple disaffiliations would significantly impair CUSU's ability to provide services and representation to the student body.

Individual students would also **lose their right to representation via their JCR/MCR at CUSU Council**, although they would still have the right to propose motions and speak.

What would the JCR lose if disaffiliated?

Affiliation fees have never been intended as a service agreement with JCRs and MCRs - they fund CUSU's wider activities that are intended to benefit all student members of CUSU, rather than providing explicit benefits to college committees. However, affiliated JCRs and MCRs do benefit from the following:

- **Voting rights on CUSU Council**, determining **CUSU policy** and **budget priorities** and the ability to hold **votes of no confidence** in elected officers
- Access to general committee **training** tailored to the work of JCRs and MCRs e.g. leadership, time management, committee skills, dealing with senior college figures
- Specialist **training for college access officers**
- Specialist **training for college welfare** and other support officers (developed with the Student Advice Service and University Counselling Service)
- Confidential **support and guidance for Welfare Officers** through the Student Advice Service
- Knowledge-sharing through CUSU-run **intercollegiate networks** such as Presidents and Externals, Access Forum, etc
- **Sky TV** for common rooms at the charity rate, rather than the business rate
- Access to college-specific **survey data** from the Big Cambridge Survey and other sources
- Guidance in **designing, analysing and presenting results from surveys** for college committees
- Support in **planning college-level campaigns** from professional staff and experienced sabbatical officers
- Ongoing **support in negotiations with college** (e.g. rent negotiations) and **attendance at college meetings** if desired
- Use of the CUSU voting server to hold **secure online elections**
- **Free pregnancy tests** for distribution to students

Ultimately, the colleges that get the most out of CUSU are the ones which engage the most. There are plenty of JCR and MCR officers who are in and out of the CUSU offices all the time, who attend and speak at CUSU Council and who will think to ask CUSU officers for help and support when they need it. They generally report high satisfaction with the work that CUSU does and the support provided to JCRs and MCRs. Of course CUSU needs to be better at engaging with colleges and individual students and the team is working hard to do more with the relatively limited resources it has, but JCR and MCR committees also need to take part and engage with CUSU in return.