

## The Regent House Petitions site: Information for Petition Leads

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### The Regent House and governance

As part of the University's governance processes, members of the Regent House are empowered to act collectively in a number of ways. The [Regent House Petitions](#) site aims to assist members of the Regent House to coordinate such actions by facilitating the **circulation of proposals** (petitions) and the **collection of signatures** in support of them.

Under the University's *Statutes and Ordinances*, members of the Regent House may:

- request a ballot on a Grace (minimum 25 members)
- request an amendment to a Grace (minimum 25 members)
- initiate a Grace (minimum 50 members)
- request a topic of concern be listed for Discussion (minimum 10 members)
- issue a fly-sheet on a topic subject to a ballot (minimum 10 members)

Individual members seeking signatures in support of the above actions can host their petition on the Petitions site and distribute a link to it so other members of the Regent House can view the details and choose whether to sign it by submitting the integrated form.

General information on the Regent House is available via links on the Petitions site homepage, including an introductory booklet, the [current Roll](#), and links to petition-related information from the [University governance site](#) and *Statutes and Ordinances*. For those new to governance at the University of Cambridge, the governance site provides detailed information on matters of interest to members of the Regent House, including on the [flow of business](#) and [raising concerns](#). The governance website also provides links to the parts of Ordinances and Notices published by the Council that govern petitions and the Regent House more generally. The [Cambridge University Reporter](#) is the medium through which much of the University's official business flows, and is where Graces, Notices, Reports, Discussion and Ballot information and other items of relevance to members of the Regent House are published.

### The Regent House Petitions site

The Petitions site is designed to host petitions drafted by members of the Regent House for circulation and signature. **The site (and its content) is only available to members of the Regent House** who should log in to the site using their University account (crsid@cam.ac.uk) and UIS password to view and sign petitions of interest. The current Roll of members of the Regent House is available on the *Reporter* website at [http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/regent\\_house\\_roll/](http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/regent_house_roll/) and everyone listed on the Roll should be able to access the Petitions site.

The Petitions site is administered by the University Draftsman and staff in the *Reporter* office (part of the Governance and Compliance Division), whose involvement with each petition is purely administrative. Queries on the Petitions site processes and administration may be directed to them by email to [UniversityDraftsman@admin.cam.ac.uk](mailto:UniversityDraftsman@admin.cam.ac.uk).

The Petitions site is hosted in the University's SharePoint Online environment. Any members of the Regent House who experience problems logging in to the site for the first time should check that their UIS account has been synced to their University Microsoft account. This is a simple process and detailed [guidance](#) is provided on the UIS website on how to check and sync passwords; if access problems persist please contact the [UIS service desk](#) in the first instance.

The Petitions site is a work in progress, set up at a time when the submission of hard-copy petitions and the collection of signatures has been made more difficult owing to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. It is hoped users will find the site clear and easy to use but it is an evolving resource and suggestions for improvements are welcome and should be sent to the above email address.

## How to raise a petition on the site

Individual members of the Regent House choose to initiate a petition and draft it themselves before requesting the petition be hosted on the site for signature. The site administrators upload the petition (and integrated signature form) and create a link to the information for circulation by the initiator as 'Petition Lead'. The Petition Lead circulates the link to other members of the Regent House, who log in to the site to view the petition and sign it if they wish to do so. Signatures are collected through the site and the Petition Lead is contacted (i) once the deadline for signatures has passed and/or (ii) once the signature threshold has been reached. If the petition meets the relevant eligibility criteria (and for an initiated Grace or topic of concern, the Petition Lead agrees the timing of the submission with the site administrators), the petition enters the formal governance process.

### Raising a petition

1. You (the Petition Lead) finalise the wording of the petition.
2. You forward the following by email to [UniversityDraftsman@admin.cam.ac.uk](mailto:UniversityDraftsman@admin.cam.ac.uk) requesting the petition be hosted on the Petitions site:
  - Final version of the petition text (formal).
  - Title and short summary (up to 3 lines) on the aim/purpose of the petition.
  - Confirmation of the petition type (e.g. ballot request, Grace amendment, topic of concern, etc).
  - Your CRSid and preferred University email address.

The email account above is managed by the University Draftsman and the *Reporter* team and is the main point of contact for the Petitions site.

3. We (the site administrators in the Draftsman's team) review the information and create the petition page on the site, adding in the threshold and deadline (see 'Types of petition' below). If needed an identifier will be assigned to the petition<sup>1</sup>. You will then be asked to check and sign-off the page before we publish it on the Petition site homepage. Your name and email address will be included as the main contact for the petition, so any queries about it should come to you.
4. You promote the petition by sending the link to the petition page to colleagues (remembering that only members of the Regent House can access the site/page).
5. Members of the Regent House log into the Petitions site, view the petition and if they are willing to sign the petition, complete the form embedded in the petition page.
6. We contact you (i) once the deadline for signatures has passed and/or (ii) once the signature threshold has been reached, to confirm whether the petition was successful in meeting the eligibility criteria for formal submission. If the petition successfully met the criteria, a list of the signatures will be attached and we will confirm next steps, including when the Notice will be published in the *Reporter*, if applicable.
7. We take the petition down from the site. As all successful petitions are published in the *Reporter*, they will not be archived on the site.

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<sup>1</sup> This may be needed to distinguish between similar petitions, e.g. two or more fly-sheets on the same Grace. The format is Petition Lead initials and the number of the petition for that Petition Lead in that term, e.g. TG01, CB03.

## General points

**It's your petition.** There are only a few informal guidelines in relation to each kind of petition (see below under 'Types of petition'), so what your petition says is largely up to you. However, *we reserve the right to exclude any statements that are likely to be considered defamatory*, in order to protect you and the University. We will contact you if there are any concerns. If possible, ask someone else to review what you have written, to check for sense and typos. There is no formal word count, but please bear in mind that people are busy and might not read a statement if they consider it to be too long. For a topic of concern or an initiated Grace, think about the timing of the launch of your petition (e.g. whether it's worth waiting until exam season is over, or whether it's too close to the promulgation of the Roll, see below).

**You are responsible for promoting your petition.** You will be able to forward a link to your petition to those you think might be interested in lending their support by attaching their signature, or willing to forward it to others who might be interested. Please note that *access to the Petitions site is restricted to members of the Regent House only and the link will not work for those not on the current Roll*. Please think carefully before sending the information to an existing distribution list, bearing in mind **data protection considerations**, as individuals might object to receiving your email if, for example, they agreed to join a list to receive operational information.

**Providing some background information is helpful.** You are asked to give a short summary on the aim/purpose of the petition, which will be included on the petition page, but you might wish to provide a fuller explanation of the context and reasons for the petition in the email used to circulate the petition link. This could include links to additional materials, e.g. items published in the *Reporter* or further information on your own website. Think through what is to be published (i) as the formal text in the body of the petition (for formal submission), (ii) as summary text on the petitions page, and (iii) as additional information not for publication, which could be included in your circulation email.

**Signatories must be current members of the Regent House.** Remind potential signatories that they need to be members of the Regent House in order to sign Regent House petitions and for their signature to count towards the petition's eligibility for submission. They can check whether their names are included in the promulgated Roll at [http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/regent\\_house\\_roll/](http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/regent_house_roll/). The names of the signatories to successful petitions are published with the petition information in the *Reporter* (within a Notice of acknowledgment for all petition types except for fly-sheets, which are reproduced once the ballot result is known).

**Once a petition has been signed by someone other than you, the Petition Lead, its text cannot be changed or amended.** If you wish to revise the text of your petition, you will need to contact the Draftsman team to discuss whether or not it can be closed to new responses and a new petition started instead. In the event of a petition's closure, we will not make contact with those who have already signed the petition to give notice of its closure, nor will we be able to provide their contact information to you; but you will be able to send a message to those you previously contacted about signing the petition. The situation is best avoided by submitting the final version of your petition at the outset. For complex matters, e.g. amending a Grace, collaborating with colleagues on petition wording and implications beforehand is advisable (see below).

**You, as the Petition Lead, must be a member of the Regent House and a signatory.** However, there is nothing to prevent you collaborating on the drafting of your petition and its promotion with those who are not members of the Regent House. The site itself does not provide functionality to enable co-authors to work together on a draft petition, but there are lots of other collaborative tools that can be used to finalise a draft.

**Students signing fly-sheets.** If you want to invite students to sign your fly-sheet, send the same information noted under 2 above to [membership@cambridgesu.co.uk](mailto:membership@cambridgesu.co.uk). Staff at Cambridge Students' Union will confirm separately when they have posted the fly-sheet to <https://www.cambridgesu.co.uk/yourvoice/fly-sheets/>, so that you can promote this link to students. In order for your fly-sheet to include student signatures, ten registered students and/or sabbatical offers will need to sign it, of which at least five must be from among the following: the sabbatical officers of the Union, the three student members of the Council, the Presidents of College Junior Combination Rooms and Middle Combination Rooms (or their equivalents).

## Types of petition

The different petition types reflect the different actions available to members of the Regent House under the University's governance processes. The deadline and signature threshold required for a petition to be formally submitted is prescribed by the *Statutes and Ordinances* and shown in the table below. If the required threshold is not met by the deadline, the petition is unsuccessful. For petitions without a formal deadline – requests for a topic of concern and initiated Graces – the annual promulgation of the Roll acts as a cut-off date.

| Petition type                              | Threshold | Deadline   | What happens if successful   |
|--|-----------|--|--|
| Request for a ballot on a Grace            | 25        | The specific deadline (time and date) will be published in the same section of the <i>Reporter</i> as the relevant Grace         | Notice published confirming receipt and that a ballot will take place and when a timetable will be published |
| Amendment to a Grace                       | 25        | The specific deadline (time and date) will be published in the same section of the <i>Reporter</i> as the relevant Grace         | Notice published confirming receipt and when the Council will consider the amendment                         |
| Amendment following a request for a ballot | 25        | The specific deadline (time and date) will be published in the <i>Reporter</i> within the Notice announcing the ballot timetable | Notice published confirming receipt and when the Council will consider the amendment                         |
| Fly-sheet                                  | 10        | The specific deadline (time and date) will be published in the <i>Reporter</i> within the Notice announcing the ballot timetable | Included with voting materials and published in the same issue of the <i>Reporter</i> as the vote result     |
| Topic of concern                           | 10        | No formal deadline but the threshold must be reached before the new Roll is promulgated in early November                        | Notice published confirming receipt and the date on which the topic will be discussed                        |
| Initiated Grace                            | 50        | No formal deadline but the threshold must be reached before the new Roll is promulgated in early November                        | Notice published confirming receipt and when the Council will consider the Grace                             |

### *Impact of the publication of the Roll on petitions without a formal deadline*

Petition Leads are strongly encouraged to launch a petition for an initiated Grace or a topic of concern in good time ahead of the publication of the Roll, which is published each year on the fifth weekday in November.<sup>2</sup> The signatories of these petitions (which are not subject to a formal deadline) must be members of the Regent House at the point the petition is submitted (after having reached the relevant threshold). If such a petition is to continue to run into a new Roll year, only the signatures of those who remain on the Roll will count towards that threshold; signatures received from individuals no longer on the Roll will not count and will have to be removed. For this reason, the running of these petitions across Roll years is best avoided.

Petition Leads with such petitions yet to reach the relevant signature threshold at the end of October will be contacted to discuss whether the petition is to be updated – so only the signatures of those who are on the new Roll are included – or withdrawn. For petitions which have already reached the threshold by that point, the site administrators and Petition Lead will agree a date for submission prior to the publication of the new Roll.

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of determining the date of publication, only Sunday does not count as a weekday.

## Requests for a ballot on a Grace

*(minimum 25 signatures)*

Members of the Regent House who have concerns about changes proposed by a Grace can request a vote on that Grace. The request does not need to be elaborate and can simply say that the signatories request a ballot (statements giving views on the Grace are best made by issuing a fly-sheet – see below). If the request reaches the threshold by the deadline, a vote will be held in line with a ballot timetable published in the *Reporter*.

## Proposals to amend a Grace

*(minimum 25 signatures)*

An amendment proposes revisions to the wording of one or more of the recommendations of the Report or other changes put forward in the Grace. As it can be tricky to frame some amendments, the [University Draftsman](#) is happy to comment on a draft. Once the wording of a proposed amendment has been submitted, there is no mechanism by which it can be revised (e.g. to make it compatible with the *Statutes and Ordinances* or other relevant provisions) so it's important to ensure the wording, phrasing and terminology used will both achieve the desired outcome and be technically correct before the petition is launched.

If the proposal reaches the threshold by the deadline, an acknowledgment Notice will be published in the *Reporter* and the amendment submitted to the Council. The Council, which is charged with authorising the submission of Graces to the Regent House, then determines whether to submit it. If submitted, a ballot will take place.

For more information, see the [FAQ on amendments and initiated Graces](#) on the governance site.

## Fly-sheets

*(minimum 10 signatures)*

Fly-sheets are statements in support of or against a particular proposal, normally presented as a Grace or an amendment to a Grace, that is subject to a ballot. Fly-sheets are provided to voters to inform their decision-making prior to casting their votes and are uploaded as part of the information on the ballot onto the [ballots website](#) (and provided by post to those receiving hard-copy voting papers and materials). After the ballot, they are reproduced in the *Reporter*.

Members of the Regent House and students can both sign the same fly-sheet and it will be published as a joint fly-sheet if the respective thresholds for student and Regent House member fly-sheets are met. Separate arrangements are being made for students wishing to sign student fly-sheets.

## Requests for a topic of concern

*(minimum 10 signatures)*

Petitioning for the discussion of a topic of concern allows members of the Regent House to draw the Council's attention to a particular matter. Topics of concern are usually included on the agenda of the next scheduled Discussion, where contributors deliver comments ('remarks') on the issues listed which are then reproduced in the *Reporter*. The Council is then required to publish a Notice in response to the remarks made on the topic.

The description of the topic is usually relatively short, but it must be sufficiently clear for readers to be able to understand what the topic is and why they might want to contribute to a Discussion on it. The list of those able to contribute and/or attend a Discussion extends beyond the membership of the Regent House to include members of Faculties, current students, graduates of the University, members of the Senate and others authorised by the Vice-Chancellor to whom a topic may be of particular interest.

Discussions are usually formal meetings held in the Senate-House and chaired by a Deputy Vice-Chancellor. However, with the COVID-19 outbreak and the temporary closure of the Senate-House, the Council has agreed that remarks will instead be accepted for publication as written submissions until further notice.

## Initiated Graces

*(minimum 50 signatures)*

A Grace initiated by members of the Regent House puts forward a proposal for approval (e.g. a change in policy).

Particular care should be taken in drafting a Grace so that it achieves the desired outcome. The [University Draftsman](#) is happy to comment on a draft, with a view to ensuring that its form does not make it difficult to implement. As a Grace is seeking the approval of the Regent House, it should be worded as a proposal. Previous examples of Graces may be useful for style and form, such as those for the [age limit on membership of the Regent House](#) and the [Real Living Wage](#) (for further examples, search the *Reporter* for 'Grace for submission under Special Ordinance A (i) 5' and look in the Notices section).

If the initiated Grace reaches the threshold by the deadline, it will be submitted to the Council. For more information, see the [FAQ on amendments and initiated Graces](#) on the governance site.

### Alternative methods of providing signatures

Although it is hoped members of the Regent House will use the Petitions site to circulate and sign petitions other methods for doing so are also accepted.

At times (e.g. during the closure of the Old Schools during the COVID-19 pandemic) it may not be possible to accept signed hard-copy petitions or signatures. However, scanned or photographed copies of signed petitions are acceptable and potential signatories can email images of a petition document bearing their handwritten signature directly to [registry@admin.cam.ac.uk](mailto:registry@admin.cam.ac.uk). Emails should be sent from a personal University email account and include the signatory's full name and CRSid. When informing colleagues about new petitions, Petition Leads may wish to suggest that they are copied into any direct signature submissions to help track the number of signatures received on the petition.

Please note that an email stating an intention to sign is not sufficient, nor is a scanned signature which does not show the wording of the petition to which it relates; the petition should appear above any space for signatures. Digital signatures and other e-signature solutions are not currently accepted.