

The Regent House Petitions site: Information for signatories

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-centred 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/ 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.

The Petitions site is hosted within 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 sign 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.

Signing a petition

1. Petitions for signature can be accessed via the links on the Petitions site homepage or by a direct link to the page (e.g. as circulated by the Petition Lead).
2. The page for each petition will include:
 - the 'formal text' of the petition, as provided by the Petition Lead;
 - a short description of the aims/purpose to be achieved, as provided by the Petition Lead;
 - the deadline and signature threshold to be met;
 - the name and contact details of the Petition Lead;
 - an embedded form for capturing signatures in support of the formal text.
3. Members of the Regent House wishing to sign a petition should complete the form embedded in the petition page. The form requires signatories to enter their CRSid, full name, last name, initials and preferred email address. The information is captured in this way to help both with confirming the identity of the signatory and with preparing the list of signatories for publication. The requirement to publish the list of signatories to a petition is set out in the *Statutes and Ordinances* and the list is included as part of the published acknowledgment Notice or fly-sheet.
4. Important notes:
 - **Petition forms must be submitted by the person wishing to be a signatory.** Forms submitted on another's behalf will NOT be accepted and will not count towards the signature threshold.
 - **Individual petitions can only be 'signed' once.** A signatory who has already submitted a petition form will not be able to complete it a second time (the form area will change to indicate this). There is no limit on the number of different petitions a signatory may sign (e.g. signing separate fly-sheets for the same ballot is fine).
 - **A petition will become unavailable once its deadline has passed** (or if the Petition Lead decides to withdraw it) and members of the Regent House will no longer be able to add their signatures.
 - **The formal text of a petition cannot be changed once a signature has been received** from someone other than the Petition Lead.
 - **Once a petition has been formally submitted, signatories cannot normally remove their names** because to do so could affect the validity of its submission. If, *before the expiry of the petition deadline*, signatories wish to amend or withdraw their response, they may do so by emailing UniversityDraftsman@admin.cam.ac.uk, ensuring the petition is clearly identifiable (e.g. by quoting its reference number if it has one).
 - Petition forms include an option to receive a system email (from Microsoft Forms) confirming submission of the form and including a link to the individual response.
 - Some petitions may include a reference number for easy identification (e.g. to distinguish different fly-sheets for the same ballot). The format of the reference will usually be the Petition Lead's initials plus a number.
5. Once the deadline for a petition has passed, the Petition Lead will be contacted about the status of the petition and next steps. The individual signatories to the petition will not be contacted separately.

General notes

Only members of the Regent House are eligible to sign Regent House petitions and access to the Petitions site is restricted accordingly. The official list of members (the promulgated Roll) contains over 6,100 names and can be found at http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/regent_house_roll/. The Roll is generated anew each year in accordance with qualifying criteria set out in the *Statutes and Ordinances*; the membership therefore changes from year to year.

A petition will only enter the formal governance process if it reaches the minimum number of signatures by the relevant deadline (see 'types of petition' below). Where applicable and as soon as administratively possible after the deadline, acknowledgement Notices for successful petitions are published (usually as Advance Notices on the *Reporter* website before being reproduced in the next published issue).

Links to a petition page may be forwarded to colleagues who might be interested in signing the petition (but note the above about site access). Please think carefully before sending the information to an existing distribution list, bearing in mind [data protection considerations](#), as individuals might object to receiving the email if, for example, they agreed to join a list to receive operational information.

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. Emails should be sent from a personal University email account and include the signatory's full name and CRSid. It is helpful if the Petition Lead is copied into the email to help them 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.

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

Petition type	Threshold	Deadline	What happens if successful
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.¹ 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 the Petition Lead will agree a date for submission prior to the publication of the new Roll.

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.

¹ For the purposes of determining the date of publication, only Sunday does not count as a weekday.

Fly-sheets

(minimum 10 signatures)

These 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](#).