

Cambridge Colleges – a guide for MSt students

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Related web link:

Educational provision of the Cambridge Colleges

www.admin.cam.ac.uk/committee/seniortutors/guidance/education.pdf

1. Introduction

Graduate study at Cambridge should be a life-changing experience. Whatever your ambitions for the future, you will benefit from participating here as fully as you can in each of the communities, large and small, to which you belong. By doing so, of course, you will also contribute to the future of the institutions with which your life here is involved. Most of those institutions will sound familiar to you. Departments, Faculties, Museums, Libraries and Laboratories: one or more of these will be where your course is taught and where your research is supervised by specialists in your discipline.

But like every Cambridge student undertaking a degree, whether studying full time or part-time, and like many of the academic staff, you are also a member of a College, where enthusiasts from every discipline meet and enrich each other across subject boundaries and generations, and you will remain a member of your College for life.

Throughout its history, Cambridge has had Colleges, which are intimate social and intellectual communities of scholars. They are educational charities, each with a particular mission and character, and they have evolved in response to different social pressures. They remain flexible, reacting to the changing needs of their members. But all are devoted to study and research across the range of disciplines and generations. They are governed by Fellows, who are mostly academics employed in the University. Those Fellows have chosen to take on the additional responsibilities involved because they believe in the values of community and interdisciplinary practice. Colleges promote and sustain these values through the care they offer to their students, individually and collectively. In addition, every member of a College takes pride in these often very beautiful places.

Colleges remain integral to the University's educational and research environment today. They can offer you accommodation during your study periods in Cambridge, and services that other universities might provide centrally. They also give you experiences and opportunities that are unique to Cambridge. A key element of

graduate College life is the Middle Common Room (MCR)¹, a term widely used both for the graduate student body, and for the shared space and associated facilities that graduate students enjoy in College. As a part-time student, you may need to make a conscious decision to engage as fully as possible with your College, but that decision is worth making while bearing in mind both how easy it will be fit this in around your studies and the time you can spend in Cambridge. Using such facilities and participating in your College's graduate society can be rewarding -- and you can make a real difference by ensuring that the College knows about current and future needs of all students.

This document describes the benefits and responsibilities of College membership. If you embrace it, your College experience can be one of the most important and memorable you develop in Cambridge. You may choose not to access some of the services to which you are entitled, and you may not need to. But you do need to know they are there for you. The fee you pay to the Collegiate University includes a College element that reflects the importance of College membership. This brief introduction to the basics of College life is intended to encourage you to make as much of your College as possible.

Some of the advantages of College membership are material, and obvious. These include induction during your first study period in Cambridge, through printed and online material, and social and orientation sessions; ongoing academic and pastoral support from your Tutor and Graduate Office; financial advice and assistance; social, cultural and sporting facilities; opportunities for development through, for example, interdisciplinary seminars or intergenerational networks of College members. Colleges administer formal processes, including matriculation (formally joining the University and College), monitoring international students' status for visa purposes, and graduation. But they also work closely with the University's central bodies to shape University policy on a range of educational and financial issues affecting graduates, and to negotiate with the University on behalf of their own students. Colleges can also provide accommodation and catering.

Some benefits of College membership are intangible, but just as real, and equally indispensable to your experience of Cambridge: conversations and friendships that take you out of your area of expertise and stimulate new ideas; the satisfaction of representing your fellow graduates in College or the University. The friendship and advice individual graduate students find in Colleges make these communities indispensable elements of your Cambridge life.

1.1. You and your College

The College has obligations to you as a member of its community. But your membership also entails responsibilities for you: to respect its rules and conventions; to have regard to the rights and needs of others; to honour commitments. As a member of the College community, you will gain much by helping to make it function effectively, especially in respect of its part-time student members.

The extent to which you may be able to take part in some of the opportunities given here (such as participation in College events, student committees and the possibility of supervising undergraduates) is likely to be determined by the ease with which you can get to Cambridge, and the time that you can spend here, when not actively engaged on your studies. Your College Tutor (see below) will be happy to discuss

¹ Some Colleges have their own variant of this term, for example College Student Association at Darwin and Wolfson Colleges.

this with you so that you can get the maximum benefit from being in the College and the University.

2. Pastoral, welfare and academic support through the Tutorial system

As a graduate member of a College, you will have access to a Tutor – a College Fellow – who is there to give you advice about any pastoral, academic, financial or emotional problems you may be experiencing. This individual may be a part of a team of Tutors. Get to know your Tutor, and introduce yourself. Then keep all relevant contact details to hand, and update him or her with your progress and any difficulties you might encounter.

Your Tutor will try to assist you in cases of financial difficulty, both in exploring the availability of the College's resources, and by tapping into the centrally provided and external services available to part-time graduate students. Your Tutor is also a source of general advice and support on academic matters. He or she is always happy to listen to your experiences of studying and research, to offer advice where appropriate, and to introduce you to academic staff and students in College with similar interests. Your Tutor will have access to CGSRS (Cambridge Graduate Supervision Reporting System) reports submitted online by your supervisor concerning your academic progress, and to any self-assessment exercise you complete via CamSIS and will liaise where necessary with academic supervisors and Departments/Faculties, particularly if you are experiencing difficulties. If you are worried by what a report says, or want a different perspective on any aspect of your work, go and talk to your Tutor. In the rare cases when things go wrong, and you need to make a formal complaint or appeal against a University Department, your Tutor may have an important role as advocate, and will guide you through the formal procedures.

More commonly, if you are ill or your work has been disrupted or you need to take time out for personal reasons, your Tutor will help you ensure that your application is presented properly to the relevant University bodies. Your Tutor will also be able to write tutorial references for you.

In most Colleges, there is a single individual (the Graduate Tutor or the Senior Tutor) who has overall responsibility for the whole community of graduate (full-time and part-time) students. Tutors meet regularly within College, and Graduate Tutors meet their counterparts in other Colleges along with senior University officers, representatives of the Administration, the Graduate Union and the Colleges' Graduate Secretaries. This means they can all share information to ensure a coordinated and effective response to issues affecting graduate students.

Another key figure in many Colleges is the Graduate Secretary, in some cases known as a Graduate Officer or Administrator. Available in College during office hours, the Graduate Secretary works closely with Tutors, and will often be able to provide immediate answers to questions on routine but essential practical matters. S/he acts as a contact point for international students and advises on the availability of other members of the College's support staff. Most Colleges have a nurse who can advise you on routine medical difficulties while you are in Cambridge; many also have a chaplain and/or a counsellor, who helps students of all faiths and none.

Together, this team of people provide an invaluable resource and are available to help in the event of personal, domestic or family difficulties.

3. Assistance and information for student parents

For graduate students with families, the Colleges work with the University to support a Childcare Adviser, who is based in the University's Childcare Office, located at 25, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, CB2 1QA, Tel: 01223 332249. While probably more relevant to full-time (resident) students, the Childcare Adviser can provide information on University and local childcare options for children of all ages, as well as information on financial assistance and details of any College family accommodation.

The Childcare Adviser also organises welcome meetings for students with children at the beginning of each academic year, and runs a parent email list to keep student parents up to date with relevant information and events. A number of Colleges also have established nurseries to which student parents may have access.

Contact the Childcare Adviser: Childcare Office
21 Trumpington Street Cambridge, CB2 1QA
Email: childcare@admin.cam.ac.uk

For more information, see also the Cambridge Guide for Student Parents at www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/childcare/studentparentguide.html

4. Accommodation and catering

4.1. Accommodation

Many full-time graduate students are housed in College-owned accommodation, particularly at the start of their time in Cambridge. Part-time students, such as those studying for a Master of Studies (MSt) degree, may require accommodation during study periods in Cambridge but are considered as 'non-resident' graduate students.

Some MSt programmes have their teaching scheduled outside of the University terms, which increases the likelihood of Colleges having student rooms available for MSt students. The Institute of Continuing Education (ICE) at Madingley Hall has over 60 en-suite bedrooms, which may be booked by MSt students, subject to availability. Alternatively, you may wish to stay with friends or family or book hotel or B&B accommodation while in Cambridge.

4.2. Catering

All Colleges enable their members to eat and drink together informally as a matter of routine. Sharing a meal provides a chance for relaxation and a social focus away from work. College catering is intended to provide a range of food at reasonable cost. Provision is at its fullest during term time but some catering is provided throughout the year (with the exception of well-advertised closures for staff vacation). Colleges and student bodies also arrange occasional, formal dining events, some of which may also enable you to invite a guest or listen to a distinguished outside speaker.

4.3. Rent and catering charges

Just as the fee does not cover the rent for full-time (resident) students living in College-owned accommodation or the costs of food, it does not cover accommodation and food costs for part-time (non-resident) students. So far as catering is concerned, costs arise both as "fixed costs" (operating a kitchen and a dining hall, and employing the necessary staff) and as "variable costs" according to the number of meals provided. Colleges make charges for catering in slightly different ways. However they do it, they need to recover both the fixed costs and the variable costs.

5. Academic enrichment, study and transferable skills

The focus of most of your academic engagement and advice will be your Faculty or Department. You should not expect formal teaching or organization of essential supervision on your research project to be provided by the College. But as multi-disciplinary communities, Colleges have a distinctive complementary role to play in helping you acquire general transferable skills, as well as in allowing you to test your ideas in conversation with those at a challenging distance from your area of expertise.

Colleges are relatively small, allowing members to get to know one another at any and every point of the day, in term and during vacations. Sharing a meal, a drink or a common room allows graduates, undergraduates and Fellows with a wide variety of academic interests and cultural origins to come together, stimulating the cross-fertilisation of ideas. The College setting can provide opportunities for you to organise and participate in informal seminars (where you can learn, for example, how to communicate your research to a supportive audience outside your subject); to run societies; and to network with alumni of the College or other College guests.

Colleges want to facilitate interaction between senior members and their graduate students. In some colleges, Fellows act as discipline-based mentors to a small number of graduate students – an arrangement which complements the more general pastoral role of Tutors, and the project-specific responsibilities of academic supervisors. Some Colleges provide opportunities for research presentations, poster exhibitions and the chance these bring to answer curious questions from peers in other disciplines. As a part-time (non-resident) student, you may need to seek to ensure arrangements suit your study periods in Cambridge, where possible. As the institutions responsible for providing supervisions of undergraduate students in Cambridge, Colleges may also provide opportunities for graduate students to gain experience in small-group teaching, especially valuable for those wishing to pursue academic careers. Colleges and Departments also work together to provide discipline-specific mentoring and teaching opportunities. These opportunities take different forms across Cambridge, and may involve you teaching in and for another College. If you are interested in gaining such teaching experience you should discuss possibilities with your Tutor and with your own research supervisor.

Students benefit from life membership of their College. Some offer opportunities for teaching, internships, travel awards, research and professional placements. Most of them award post-doctoral Research Fellowships as a first rung on the academic career ladder. These posts may be funded from the College's endowment or made possible through private gifts to the College, often from alumni.

All Colleges provide library and IT facilities, complementing the University Library and specialist Departmental and Faculty holdings, and providing you with another quiet place to study. Colleges may also provide study skills or academic writing sessions, though you should look to the University's Language Centre or your Department or Faculty for specific language work, either in the academic use of English or in a foreign language. However, you should not expect your College to underwrite the costs of additional English language teaching.

6. Financial support

6.1. General finance

You should have the financial resources available in £ sterling to cover all course, research, accommodation and incidental requirements. The fee for MSt students reflects University and College costs associated with the support for which you are eligible and the benefits and facilities the Colleges and the University hope you will enjoy. This may be collected either by your College or your Department, depending on your course. If you cannot meet the financial obligations of the course you may be required to leave the University temporarily (intermit) until sufficient sources of funding can be found. If it looks as though you cannot meet these financial obligations, do seek advice from your College Tutor.

6.2. Unforeseen hardship

All Colleges do provide some form of financial support if you encounter unforeseen and unforeseeable hardship. Causes might include the collapse of a commercial sponsor, or a sudden major illness. Colleges may be able to access sources of hardship funding, adjust fee payment schedules, or make a loan or a hardship grant. Again, seek advice from your Tutor in the first instance, and expect to provide full details of your circumstances and how they have changed. They will be treated in confidence, and will enable the Tutor to help you as quickly and as efficiently as possible.

If you experience difficulties that are likely to mean that you will be unable to complete your MSt dissertation by the submission date, you should notify your Graduate Tutor and MSt Course Director, outlining the circumstances and requesting additional time to complete the dissertation. A case will then be put to the relevant Degree Committee for approval of an extension, usually between 3 and 6 months. If you are likely to need a full academic year, then you should request permission to intermit.

6.3. Research-related expenditure associated with your research and career development

-Colleges do their best to contribute towards the cost of exceptional individual research-related expenditure. This might include, for example, visiting an archive or undertaking fieldwork. You should expect, however, to assemble a portfolio of funding to support these activities from your Department, from the University itself, and your funding body or sponsor, if you have one, as well as from your College. You might also be required to dip into your own private resources.

Do not expect your College to contribute towards teaching-related costs (e.g. chemical reagents, equipment, essential photocopying) you incur as an integral part of your course, or towards travel on course-organised trips. These costs are normally covered by the Faculty or Department concerned. Please note that sometimes they are specifically mentioned in the prospectus or offer of admission as additional costs to be borne by the student or otherwise.

7. Social, recreational and sporting facilities

Many social and recreational activities in Cambridge are College-based: concerts, plays, competitive inter-College sports, aerobics, dance classes, and social events, discos and balls. There is also an extensive and complementary range of specialised University-level societies. Musical activities often play a prominent role in College, involving performance at a high standard. Clubs and groups exist for many other pursuits, both intellectual and practical, catering for a huge range of tastes and

abilities. Colleges provide the infrastructure support: common rooms, TV and games rooms, bars, gyms, boathouses and sports fields, while students run many of the activities.

Whatever the mix of Fellows, graduates and undergraduates at your College, you can be as fully integrated as you wish into the social, recreational and sporting life of the community. And though many activities are located in your College, it is normal for students to attend events at other Colleges. Doing so enables you to appreciate the identity and individuality that is characteristic of Cambridge's small College communities.

8. Administration

Colleges deal with some administrative matters concerning your status within the University, from when you formally register to when you gain your degree.

The Institute of Continuing Education (ICE) is the University's admitting body for MSt degrees. The ICE Registry Office handles MSt applications and liaises with Colleges during the admissions process to ensure MSt applicants secure their College membership.

Colleges liaise extensively with various funding bodies, as well as monitoring your own account with the College for catering and other services. They regularly consult with the MCR or graduate society on charges, and about the arrangement for paying them. Non-payment of fees can lead to the termination of your course of study. So you are responsible for keeping your College informed of your financial situation, and are strongly advised to discuss serious financial problems with your Tutor at an early stage. Staying silent will not make these problems go away; confronting them makes them manageable – and your Tutor is there to help you.

9. College rules and statutes

Every College has rules about individual and communal discipline, as well as mechanisms enabling students to complain and to offer feedback about any aspect of their College. Observe the rules and make use of feedback mechanisms.

The University also has a comprehensive appeals and complaints procedure relating to graduate degrees, which is set down by the Board of Graduate Studies. The Board handles appeals and complaints relating to MSts but the first point of contact for an MSt student considering making an appeal or a complaint is the College Graduate Tutor. Any appeal or complaint should be raised and dealt with at the earliest opportunity as this facilitates early resolution. Students should be provided with information on who to turn to in the first instance if they wish to raise a concern. The Graduate Union is always ready to offer advice and support to individual students

Full information on current informal and formal academic complaints and appeals procedures is available at

<http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/gradstud/policy/complaints/index.html>

If neither the College's nor the University's internal procedures have resolved a complaint, you can take it to the national body that investigates complaints, the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (see their website: <http://www.oiahe.org.uk>).

10. Conclusion

Colleges vary in the detail of their provision, atmosphere and culture, but work together to provide essential benefits to their members. The shared academic resources, experience and practical support that Colleges make available to their graduate students add another dimension to the academic provision of the University. You will gain most from your College by contributing as fully as you can to the shared intellectual and social life it offers.

11. Summary of what you can expect from your College

Welfare and practical support

- A Tutor to monitor your progress, to provide prompt information and advice on academic and pastoral matters, and to act as an advocate when necessary.
- An induction programme shortly after arrival, helping you understand how the College works, and how students fit within the wider context of the University, funding organisations, the city and so on.
- Tutorial references and other official letters (e.g. to confirm status, etc.) during and after your time in Cambridge.
- Assistance in response to special needs and disability.
- Advice and information concerning the provision of childcare in Cambridge.

Accommodation and catering

- The opportunity to book a College room for short study periods in Cambridge.
- Advice and information on accommodation available elsewhere in Cambridge.
- College catering, formal and informal, at reasonable prices.

Academic enrichment and support

- Library (complementing the University Library and more specialised Faculty and Department libraries) and IT facilities.
- Opportunities to exchange experiences across disciplines and generations in an informal setting
- Assistance in communicating with University authorities on academic and other matters.
- In combination with Faculty schemes and/or discussion with your supervisor, opportunities to supervise undergraduates.

Finance and funding

- Advice on identifying and obtaining financial assistance, whether for ongoing study (e.g. funding a PhD course or applying for a College Research Fellowship), fieldwork expenses, or presenting work at international academic conferences.
- Help in cases of unforeseen and unforeseeable financial difficulties (as distinct from failure to access funds which were guaranteed as part of the admissions procedure).
- Such help may be in the form of adjusted payment schedules or a loan, or, in cases of serious hardship, a non-returnable grant.

A strong social focus

- A student association or graduate society (typically the Middle Common Room (MCR)) run by students but with support from the College.
- Opportunities, typically through the College's MCR, to run and participate in seminars and other events, and to develop presentational skills.
- Opportunities for standing for election to the MCR and/or other representative bodies.
- Suitable facilities for students' social, cultural and recreational activities (e.g. sports, music, etc.)

Administration

- Administrative services including initial matriculation through to presentation for a degree.
- Advice, where needed, concerning relationships with funding bodies; and advice and where necessary action concerning a student's financial engagement with the College and the University.
- Mechanisms for feedback, suggestions and complaints, to the College.
- Membership of a network of old members, and of the College, for life.

12. What your College expects from you

- Full and accurate information at admission, for example, about academic and other qualifications (including English language competence); and ability to pay for the course undertaken and other expenses while in Cambridge.
- Regular contact with the College, including the Tutor, and providing up-to-date contact details.
- Informing the Tutor of any material changes in circumstances.
- Prompt responses to requests for information from the College.
- Full engagement with the academic programme, and (where appropriate) participation in other aspects of College life.
- Meeting completion dates and similar targets.
- Meeting financial obligations to the College and University, paying fees and settling bills within the deadlines specified.
- Respecting the rules and conventions of the College.
- Respecting the rights and needs of others in the College, staff as well as fellow students.