1 Summary

My alumni trip was done in two legs, the first between 17th June to 23rd June, visiting Berlin and Stockholm; and the second between 27th July to 2nd August, visiting Paris, Luxembourg and Switzerland.

The two trips cost a total of approximately £1140. A brief breakdown of each alumni society visited is shared below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Alumni Society / Location</th>
<th>Alumnus in contact / Events attended</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June 17-20</td>
<td>German Cambridge Society / Berlin</td>
<td>Timo Graf / Lunch with GCS members at the Weihenstephaner</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 20-22</td>
<td>Cambridge Alumni Society of Sweden / Stockholm</td>
<td>Louise Stenfors Virenfeldt / Lunch and Tour around the Ministry for Foreign Affairs with Louise</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 28-29</td>
<td>Cambridge Society of Luxembourg / Luxembourg</td>
<td>Martin Curwen, Steve Brabbs / Lunch and walk with pensioners of European Investment Bank, Company tour to DuPont and Luxembourgish dinner with Steve</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 29-31</td>
<td>Oxford and Cambridge Club of Zurich / Stein Am Rhein &amp; Zurich</td>
<td>Dr Rebekka Greminger, Gill Parker / Swiss Summer Party and Cultural Tour around Stein Am Rhein, Lunch atop the Hohenklingen Castle</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 1-2</td>
<td>Cambridge Society of Paris, Cambridge Alumni Energy Society / Paris</td>
<td>Christopher Segar, Antoine Huard / Lunch with Christopher by Place de la Bastille, Coffee with Antoine by Rue de Richelieu</td>
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</table>

The trip was an amazing experience for a student like me to engage with the alumni societies across Europe, as well as learn about the best practices of each alumni society in interacting with incoming students, current university members as well as recent graduates.
2 Alumni Meet-Ups and Learning

Some of the issues and recommendations are learnings from conversations with alumni during my visits, while others are personal observations that may be applicable for alumni societies with sufficient capacity and manpower to address them.

General Engagement

Data privacy and confidentiality – Due to data privacy concern, I am aware that the university is not able to share the list of current students attending university from each country to the alumni societies. This means the alumni society is not always able to connect to new graduates and current students of the university. This has been a hurdle for alumni societies to attract new members as they are not able to target the relevant students directly. However, data privacy may be a legal concern and the way to overcome this is strong communication and collaboration between the alumni development office and each alumni society.

Membership for graduates and current students – The cost of membership can sometimes be a deterring factor for new alumnus, especially when they have yet to see the benefit of joining as a member. Allowing a year of participation or a period of free attendance can attract new members to join and see it for themselves.

Expat alumni members – In certain cities, graduates may not participate in alumni activities due to the uncertainty of their long term commitment to a city whilst working as an expatriate/short term assignments. The alumni society may have limited visibility to this group of graduates that are mobile and travels frequently. A possible solution to this is directly connecting with the alumni society if the alumni office is aware of such graduates.

Connecting via social media – Most alumni society has a well-managed Facebook group for alumni members to interact and be updated on the latest events. Publicising this to Cambridge students before graduation will be an effective way to connect them before communication is lost upon graduation. The current feature of confirming your university affiliation using @cam.ac.uk address prevents the problem with fraud accounts as well. This also allows alumni Facebook groups to interact with student Facebook groups for collaboration (ie organising and publicising a student-alumni dinner)
Engaging current and future Cambridge students

Co-organisation with student society – Alumni societies that reach out and have a working relationship with the relevant student society will be able to engage current and future Cambridge students effectively. For example, a dinner for incoming students, with current students and alumni attending allows incoming students to meet and seek advice on settling into Cambridge. It is also popular as a networking platform for current students seeking internship/graduate opportunities.

Attend Higher Education fairs / outreach to high schools – One of the highlights of my conversation with Martin from the Luxembourg society is the mention of attending higher education fairs as a Cambridge University representative. This, together with practice interview sessions for aspiring candidates helps establish the presence of the alumni society and seems to be an effective way to connect to future students!

Out of Term activities and Engagement – The majority of alumni events occur during university term times which makes it difficult for current students to join. Publicity of activities outside of term by the university alumni office to current students for their respective countries will help current students connect to the alumni societies and foster a relationship prior to graduation. This will need to be done from the alumni office as the alumni society may not have access to the current student’s database.

Intellectual engagements (ie debates!) – Aside from social activities such as dinners and meet ups, events such as debates and seems to be well-received, for example in the Paris Alumni Society.

Grants for language study and various other purposes – One of the programs that I believe have a great impact is the language travel grants and travel awards by the German and Paris alumni societies. It allows current members of the university to visit the city to learn a new language or pursue something of academic interest. Although this may not be possible for younger and smaller alumni societies, it may be useful to offer travel awards that emphasises on extended learning/exposure in each country that will be visited. This allows the student to better understand the culture and experience the lifestyle of a city/country beyond that of a tourist!
**Collaboration with departments/colleges** – The collaboration or sharing of alumni information with specific departments can help engage current students that will eventually join the alumni society. For example, the Cambridge Alumni Energy Society will benefit greatly from collaboration with the engineering society to attract students interested in the energy sector. Having travel tours to companies by alumnus can really help a current student understand the industry better and network with the relevant members in the industry.

**Engaging Recent Graduates**

*Increasing alumni interaction through cross-uni/school alumni activity* – By organising events open to alumni members other than Cambridge, it seems that the feedback and interaction during the event increases significantly. This was the experience from the Zurich Oxbridge Society. Although this may dilute the focus on Cambridge, it allows the alumni society to better engage its own members in the longer term.

**Gap in alumni with young family** – It was highlighted (although not conclusively verified) that the composition of the alumni society is often that of young working adults and older, retiring professionals – there may a gap of alumni with growing children whom have recently started a family. This is not conclusive but may hint that the extra time and commitment to family as well as work puts the alumni society at a lower priority. This may be remediated if alumni events have a range of activities including family-oriented sessions. The feedback from events organised by the Zurich Oxbridge Society (Dr Rebekka) is that events with different activities stretched across the day attracted more participants who would attend sessions that they were interested in (i.e., the networking drinks and party session and forgoing the city walk or lake tour option).

**Follow up on making travel award more impactful**

Personally, I have found the use of Instagram and sharing of individual photos more impactful as I was able to reach a wider audience in a short amount of time. The use of the Cambear as the travel ambassador helped attract attention during as well as after my travels. It was an easy conversation starter for random tourists and even Cambridge alumnus.

I would recommend that a similar alumni paraphernalia that is cute, affordable and convenient (such as a teddy with a Cambridge alumni t-shirt)
be used to publicise an alumni society effectively with the general public as well as for future travel awards.

By using such as mascot and a fixed set of social media tag phrases (such as #CambridgeAlumniTravelAward or #CamBearTravels), the experiences of different travel award holders can be collated and shared for a combined impact. This can also be part of the Cambridge Alumni social media strategy so that our experiences are easily recognisable as part of the travel award.

3 Personal Experience and Learning

My experience travelling with the Student Travel Award was rewarding and fulfilling as I would otherwise not have the opportunity to meet alumnus and learn more about working environment in each country.

Limited Time to Travel - As I had a summer internship as well as a month blocked to return to Malaysia, I had a limited window to visit the countries as part of my travel award. My recommendation will be to request for a leave from the internship if possible – it helped me clear my mind from the internship and return after the trip with more focus! 😊

Allowance for travel disruptions – Travel disruptions, flight crew strikes, accidental miscommunication.. Many things can go wrong simultaneously which can affect a tight schedule. My experience with a 5-hour flight delay due to a crew strike meant that I was not able to meet the Paris alumni society for dinner. Fortunately, I had an extra day in Paris with no concrete plans which allowed me to meet with some other alumnus instead. It is recommended that future students allow for at least 2 days in each location and have a loose itinerary – better safe than leaving empty!

Align with planned alumni events – I found that the best way to plan an alumni meeting is to align my travels with planned alumni events. My visit to the Zurich Oxbridge Society was smooth-sailing as it was in conjunction to the Swiss Summer Party. However, this is not always possible when planning a trip with multiple destinations. The best suggestion I can think of is to have an information session with aspiring applicants to share about each alumni society (ie monthly meet-ups / casual dinners) so that applicants can integrate this as early as possible into their planning. For example I was very fortunate to be able to join Martin on his weekly walk around Luxembourg on Thursday, although this was a matter of coincidence.
**Transport options**—Booking flights as early as possible will allow for cheap and quick travel between cities. However, this is sometimes not possible when the travel itinerary is not fully confirmed (as in my case due to an internship). The recommendation for this is to be resourceful in the transport options—sometimes it can cost the same or less by visiting an additional city as a point of transit. For example, I included Paris into my plan after realising that it was cheaper to fly from Aberdeen to Paris and take a train to Luxembourg, than a direct flight to Luxembourg. Similarly, it was cheaper to transit in Heidelberg and Schaffhausen when taking the train from Luxembourg to Stein Am Rhein due to the lower hostel price in Schaffhausen.

**Internet Connectivity**—Data roaming in EU helped me significantly in communicating with Jennie in CUDAR as well as update the alumnus when there is a change in plan. The total estimated cost for data roaming was 25 pounds. I believe this is acceptable as it includes the cost of calling and sending messages to confirm final plans for the trip throughout the 14 days around Europe. The EU data roaming option was sufficient that I did not purchase additional numbers specific to each country.

**Other Recommendations**

**South-East Asia / Non-Europe travel award**—For international students returning to their home country like myself, the travel award will be very useful to allow the student to connect with alumni around the region. This may include a trip around Asia (Hong Kong & SEA: Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand). However, this should not include the cost of the return trip from UK as this will consume a large part of the award. Travelling between Asian countries / USA states will allow a student to explore and engage with alumni in these regions too!

**Winter / Lent / Easter vacation travel award**—Allowing students to visit alumni during other term breaks will increase the chances of meeting alumni as most alumni may be away for vacation during the summer period.