

**Postgraduate Executive Forum**  
**11 November 2014, 5-6.15pm, Arts Seminar Room 7**

**MINUTES**

**Present:** Vicki Cormie (Library), Dr Clare Peddie (Pro-Dean Taught Postgraduates), Professor Verity Brown (Provost), Ondrej Hajda (Director of Representation), Tania Strützel (Postgraduate Convenor), Zoe Ingram (Art History), Murillo Pagnotta (Biology), Ying Ge (Chemistry), Ellen MacDougall (Classics), Xu Zhu (Computer Science), Tadas Balsys (Economics&Finance), Susan Garrard (English), Cassice Last (Film Studies), Liam O'Brien (Geography&SD), Dawn Jackson-Williams (History), Adam Pope, John-Harmen Valk (IR), Jonas Kollmann (Management), Oliver Allanson (Maths), Simon Kay (Modern Languages), Joe Slater (Philosophy), Claire Motion (Physics&Astronomy), Lizzie Bradford (Psychology&Neuroscience), Tomi Bartole (Social Anthropology)

**Apologies:** Monika Gostic (Medicine)

**Absent:** Spencer Bentley (Divinity), Sebastian Fischer (Earth&Environmental Sciences)

**1. Office/study space**

Tania asked the reps to raise any issues they were experiencing with study space.

Adam (IR) commented that the situation is especially difficult for IR Masters students due to the high number of students and no dedicated study space in the School. The situation has only been exacerbated this year by the difficult housing situation and commuting students being in even greater need of study space in town.

The Provost acknowledged the lack of study space, especially in the Arts Building and replied that the University is looking into alternative study spaces. The Provost recommended using the facilities in the **Bute Building** that are **open to all PGR students**. (If your swipe card does not let you into the building please email idcards@) There is study space in the Bell Pettigrew Museum students can use as well as a sofa area outside the museum. PhD students are allocated office space in that area which makes it an ideal space to foster a postgraduate community.

Susan (English) raised the issue of **66 North Street** and that the University is currently undertaking headcounts to survey the usage of the PG study space. The Provost replied that the same is done for the office space in the Bute building. John-Harmen inquired whether it is possible to get the names of the students who do not use their desks so these could be allocated to other students. The Provost replied that this would not be possible because of data protection.

Claire (Physics) commented that all tutorial rooms in Physics are open and can be used if students ask the secretaries. Claire asked whether it was possible to show these bookings online across the University.

The Provost replied that only one person per School can access the system to avoid overbooking. **Students should talk to the secretaries who can let students know about available rooms.**

Dawn (History) mentioned the **Postgraduate Writers' Groups** she has been organizing and that also offer a study space for certain hours in the day. If anyone is interested in joining the group, more information and the times can be found [here](#).

Tadas (Economics) raised the issue that only CS students are able to access certain CS computer labs that are however not very frequently used. In other universities they are open to everyone. The Provost replied that students should talk to their supervisors if they can present a valid academic reason why they need to use these special computer labs.

John-Harmen mentioned that while the IR PhD students greatly appreciate their office space in the Bute building it also creates a distance from the department and decreases the opportunity to meet staff. The Provost acknowledged this problem and replied that Biology is in an even worse situation with several buildings spread across town.

Dawn (History) inquired **whether staff offices could be used as study space** while staff is on research leave. The Pro-Dean replied that there might be issues with sensitive personal information being stored in the office and that this would have to be an individual decision made by the staff member.

The Provost and the Pro-Dean agreed that the best student community existed where there was study and community space provided within the School. The reps were encouraged to talk to each other since some Schools have better provision than others. For instance, Lizzie (Psychology) noted that the PGT study room in her School is under-used because students feel that it is too far away.

Adam (IR) commented that most Master students work at night and more information about **24-hour computer rooms** would be useful. (Update: Please see [yourunion.net/studyspaces](http://yourunion.net/studyspaces))

Vicki Cormie (Library) asked if PGT students would use **Martyrs Kirk** if it was opened to them in the evenings and potentially on weekends. The response was overwhelmingly positive. Vicki said there are certain issues related to extending opening hours and access (e.g. cleaning and staffing) but the Library is looking into it.

## **2. PGT review process**

The Pro-Dean explained the context and purpose of the current PGT portfolio review process which had been commissioned by Court. The review panel is meeting with every School to find out about their admission and recruitment

strategies as well as strategic plans for the future. The initial publication of the report will be on 8 January. So far the review team has encountered some common themes across the University but also some School specific issues. In every case the Pro-Dean has been impressed by the standard of teaching.

Tania asked the PGT reps in attendance for any comments they had on their PGT experience thus far.

Adam commented that the ISS program in IR had been very vulnerable to loss of key staff which had caused problems, exacerbated by the over-recruitment of students. The department is working on resolving these issues.

Susan mentioned that one of the MLitt programs in English had a very similar problem as it was relying on particular staff members. This was not helped by the out-of-date website that still showed programs on offer which had not been running for some time.

Zoe (Art History) raised the issue of the MLitt History of Photography which had been advertised and recruited for but then didn't run due to a staff member going on leave. This left two students very unhappy.

Dawn mentioned the concern of History Master students that the first large deadline was too early in the semester and did not give students sufficient time to prepare. In English students only have one deadline that makes up 100% of the module grade. Adam (IR) commented that the communication among module coordinators could be better to avoid having several **deadlines** too close together.

### **3. Tutor pay and training**

Tania said that last year's PGR reps ran a survey on tutoring pay that would be repeated this year to determine if any progress has been made.

Joe (Philosophy) is currently in discussion with his Head of School as there are inconsistencies within the School, i.e. Social Anthropology has fewer words to mark per hour than Philosophy.

Tomi (Social Anthropology) asked whether tutors should have received plagiarism training. The Provost replied that this was covered in the revised TGAP course for PGR students. Tutors should not be dealing with the investigation of **plagiarism**, this should be immediately referred to the AMO (Academic Monitoring Officer).

Dawn mentioned that the **in-School training** in History is currently done individually by the module coordinators which can lead to inconsistencies. After consultation with the DoT, there will now be an all-School training afternoon before semester 2 including a "toolkit lunch" to discuss different techniques how to run a tutorial.

Marking fayres as part of the normal training do not get paid.

Ellen commented that Classics has in-School training that also includes dealing with problematic situations in seminars which is led by a member of staff.

Claire (Physics) asked the other reps what **feedback** tutors get as she did not receive her feedback until Week 9 when it is too late to change anything. Joe (Philosophy) replied that all tutors should be observed in Philosophy but the tutor has to organise their own observation. Feedback is given both orally and written.

#### **4. PGR Supervision/Mentoring**

Dawn asked the reps how the **supervisor arrangement** works in other Schools and what role the second supervisor has. In History the second supervisor only has a pastoral function and some students only meet them once. Susan and John-Harmen responded that this is done on a case-by-case basis in English and IR. Claire replied that the second supervisor in Physics acts as a safety net and normally does not give academic input. Ellen said that students meet their second supervisor at least once per semester in Classics. In English the second supervisor is chosen by the student whereas they are assigned in IR.

Susan (English) mentioned that PhD students might be afraid to talk to too many people in the department about their research to prevent not having them as the internal examiner. The Provost replied that the second supervisor should be the priority. Internal examiners can always be found externally as well.

#### **5. AOCB**

Murillo (Biology) asked **who is responsible for paying expenses** in the School. There appears to be a lack of understanding over who - the department, the supervisor, or the student - is responsible to pay for certain expenses such as buying equipment, covering conference costs and taking extra courses (for things not offered by CAPOD). It would be great to have guidelines for this.

The Provost responded that budgets are devolved to the Schools and that it is their decision how to address this. Often budgets are devolved to supervisors. For conferences, some Research Councils will cover travel expenses. In general, this decision is best left at School level to ensure fairness and consistency. Psychology has a very good [handbook](#) for their PhD students which states exactly what is covered and which can be used as best practice example.

Tania asked what the research allowances are like in other Schools, especially at Masters level. Adam (IR) replied that they were discouraged to go anywhere for their dissertation research as they could find everything in books. Adam also mentioned that he would like to organize a field trip for his course to Brussels but that it is difficult to secure funding. The Provost recommended looking into CAPOD funding if the trip had academic value. In History, English and Classics Masters students receive a research allowance.

**ACTION:** The reps are encouraged to find out about the current practice in their Schools and ask for transparency. Tania will circulate a survey to all reps so that examples of best practice can be shared across Schools.

**The next meeting will take place on Tuesday, 24 February, 5pm, Committee Room/Students' Association.**