

Postgraduate Executive Forum
24 February 2015, 5-6pm, Board Room/Students' Association

MINUTES

Present: Ewan McCubbin, Vicki Cormie (Library), Dr Clare Peddie (Pro-Dean Taught Postgraduates), Dr Colin Allison (Pro-Provost Science), Ondrej Hajda (Director of Representation), Tania Strützel (Postgraduate Convenor), Murillo Pagnotta (Biology), Ying Ge (Chemistry), Caroline Belanger (Classics), Xu Zhu (Computer Science), Amber Shields (Film Studies), Adam Pope, Chris Peys (IR), Jonas Kollmann (Management), Joe Slater (Philosophy), Claire Motion (Physics&Astronomy), Sebastian Fischer (Earth&Environmental Sciences)

Apologies: Monika Gostic (Medicine), Zoe Ingram (Art History), Oliver Allanson (Maths), Tadas Balsys (Economics&Finance), Liam O'Brien (Geography&SD)

Absent: Spencer Bentley (Divinity), Tomi Bartole (Social Anthropology), Simon Kay (Modern Languages), Lizzie Bradford (Psychology&Neuroscience), Dawn Jackson-Williams (History), Susan Garrard (English)

1. Matters arising: PGT Review Update (Clare)

Clare Peddie gave an update on the progress of the PGT portfolio review that was conducted last semester. The review panel (including Clare, Tania and two other staff members) met with all 21 Schools as well as RBS, Student Services, Careers, ELT, Admissions, Registry, Estates and the Library to survey their provision and future strategy for PGTs. The review had been well received by the Schools that appreciated the opportunity to focus on their PGT cohorts and share examples of good practice. Clare thanked all the student reps for their valuable input. A 30 page **report** summarizing the findings and strategic recommendations has been produced and is currently being discussed by the Principal's Office before going to Learning&Teaching Committee and Academic Council. However, there are already recommendations that have been acted upon such as the **PGT access trial for Martyrs Kirk** and an improved system for **accommodation** offers for 2015 entrant students. Tania stated that there will be 700 places¹ available for postgraduates next year which is twice as many as last year. There will also be a number of guaranteed places for "vulnerable" students, i.e. students from overseas and students only studying in St Andrews for one semester. Furthermore, the application process is improved so that current St Andrews students applying for another degree and hence on a conditional offer will now be considered during the first round of the allocation process when accommodation applications open on 1 April 2015. Both Clare and Tania stressed that they were happy with the outcomes of the review so far, especially with regard to the new joint-up approach of all units in tackling existing issues.

¹ Agnes Blackadder Hall: 6 places (£93 p/w); Albany Park: 90 places (£92-95 p/w); Angus&Stanley Smith Houses: 45 places (£95p/w); Deans Court: 56 places catered (£154 p/w); DRA: 120 places, FPA: 224 places (£163 p/w); New Fife Park: 135 places (£117 p/w).

2. Martyrs Kirk Trial & Study space (Ewan)

Ewan McCubbin, Assistant Director of the Library, gave some background on Martyrs Kirk. It was opened in November 2013 and was intended as a silent research reading room for academic staff and research postgraduates with 40 available desks. However, usage numbers remain low after 5pm and on weekends while the Main Library is heavily used and often overcrowded. In light of these pressures on study space and the lack of PGT-dedicated study space elsewhere, the decision was taken jointly by the Library, the Proctor's Office and the Students' Association to **extend the opening hours for Martyrs Kirk until midnight 7 days a week during this semester** and also **allow PGTs access on a trial basis from 5pm-midnight on weekdays and all day on weekends**. Ewan stressed that this was a trial and the effects of the expected increased usage would be closely monitored by the Library. The Library is very pleased to offer the extended opening hours to all users of Martyrs Kirk and hopes that this will also cater to the needs of PGRs who had requested these extended opening hours in the past.

Chris (IR) asked whether it was solely the responsibility of the Library to provide study space and whether the University should not take a stance on this since 40 spaces were not a solution to the existing pressure on study space. Ewan agreed that the Kirk does not provide THE solution to the study space problem and that it is hoped that there may be scope for a PG-dedicated study space area with the new **Library redevelopment** plans currently being discussed that would increase the Library's capacity by about 300 study spaces for the start of the AY 2017/18 (subject to Court approval).

Some reps pointed out that PGT students of their departments were not yet aware that the trial had started on Monday, 16 February 2015 despite the email being sent out to all postgraduate students. Tania and Ewan agreed to promote the trial further via their Social Media channels.

Tania also reminded the reps that there are now **lockers available to rent in Martyrs Kirk for £15 p.a.** that are located in the print© room. Lockers are available to PGRs only and can be paid for via

<http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/library/services/other/lockers/>.

Ewan added that the Library was also undertaking **refurbishment in the King James Library** over spring break which would result in **12 additional study spaces** with access to power plugs.

Tania reminded the reps that the **new study space centre** on the ground floor of the **Gateway** building opened at the beginning of the semester and was not well used yet. It provides **88 study spaces** including 24 PCs and is **available to all students from 9am-9.30pm 7 days a week**.

ACTION: Tania to promote the new Martyrs Kirk trial on Social Media and in the Sunday Postgraduate.

3. Update on tutor pay discussion (Tania)

Following a meeting with the Arts PGR Reps, Tania **presented a paper on tutor pay to the Learning & Teaching Business Committee** outlining the general problems of insufficient prep and marking timing, training and a growing dissatisfaction among the PGR tutors. While the paper was well received by the Proctor and the Deans who were sympathetic to the issues PGR tutors are facing, they were hesitant to be prescriptive to the Schools with regard to how many hours should be paid for prep and marking.

However, the Proctor's Office was surprised by the amount of time tutors normally spend on their work and recognized this as an issue from a quality assurance perspective and a need for enhanced training and support within the Schools. It was agreed that the **May LTC Open Forum** will focus on this topic and all **DoTs, relevant module coordinators and PGR reps/tutors** will be invited to come along. Tania asked the reps to send her any examples of best practice (especially from the Sciences) that could be shared beforehand.

Colin pointed out that Computer Science provides script sheets for tutors that considerably reduce their preparation time. He further noted that the amount of time PhD students spend on tutoring can significantly hinder the progress of the PhD which is why some students who are not on Tier4 visa choose to go to 75% FTE.

Chris noted that many tutors are getting more and more frustrated and are considering joining the UCU to take action. Amber added that pressure needs to be applied from different sources, not just from the tutors themselves but also from College Gate.

Clare offered to raise this issue at the DoT lunch the following day as a point of discussion.

ACTION:

Tania to disseminate further information about the LTC Open Forum in May in due course.

PGR reps to send Tania examples of best practice with regard to tutor pay.

Clare to raise matter at DoT lunch.

4. Sharing best practice

Joe mentioned the launch of a **mentoring scheme in Philosophy** initiated by the School President through which female students and students with a minority background can apply to be mentees. This is thought to address the underrepresentation of these groups in Philosophy.

Adam has been working on **Academic Skills Project workshops** for **IR** together with Cat Wilson from CAPOD to address the lack of an **academic induction** for PGT students of diverse non-UK academic backgrounds. There will be a series of workshops run this semester that will then be rolled out for the next academic year to start in Orientation Week.

5. AOCB

Murillo raised the issue of what constitutes appropriate **Statistics training for Biology PhD students**. While CAPOD offers Statistics workshops on using R they are not sufficient to cover the theoretical aspects of Statistics. However, PhD students are not allowed to audit Masters classes on this topic because that would negatively impact the student-staff ratio.

Chris mentioned that a similar issue exists in IR where PhD students would welcome more formal training on methodology and statistical analysis.

Ideally, one School in the Sciences (most likely Maths) would offer a semester long Statistics course that could be taken by PGR students from across Schools. It would have to be determined who designs and finances such a module.

ACTION: Murillo to consult other Biology PhD students on a draft content plan for such a module. Interested PGR reps from other Schools to get in touch with Murillo and Tania to coordinate efforts for the implementation of such a module in the next AY.

PRES (Postgraduate Research Experience Survey) will **launch on Monday, 2 March 2015 and close on 14 May 2015**. All eligible PGRs will receive an email from the Proctor's Office notifying them of the survey opening. Tania reminded everyone that a high turnout in this survey is crucial to collect feedback on every aspect of the postgraduate experience and that the results are considered by Senior University Management. For the first time, student representatives also made use of the opportunity to add institutional questions on PG-dedicated space and other services. Tania asked the reps to help spread the word about the survey and to **encourage fellow students to fill it in** as turnout has been very low in previous years. The equivalent for taught postgraduates will go live at the end of April and stay open until June. All eligible PGTs will also be notified via eMail about the PTES launch.

Nominations for the **Students' Association Elections** are open from 19-26 February with voting taking place on 5 and 6 March. Tania encouraged the reps to put themselves forward for any of the over 60 elected positions and to spread the word amongst fellow students. Tania also stressed the importance of a high PG voter turnout which has been considerably lower than the overall turnout over the past years. Publicity material for the elections will be available on Social Media.

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday, 28 April, 5pm, Board Room/Students' Association.