



**Postgraduate Academic Forum**  
St Andrews Students Association

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**Meeting date:** Friday 22nd May (14:00-16:00)  
Small Rehearsal Room (Student Union Building)

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**GENERAL INFORMATION**

**Meeting called by:** President of Education - Emily Bannister  
**Type of Meeting:** Postgraduate Academic Forum (PGAF)  
**Chair:** President of Education - Emily Bannister  
**Note Taker(s):** Postgraduate Representation Intern - Rhiannon Cadelle

**ATTENDANCE**

**Attendees:** Provost - Dr Morven Shearer, Director of Student Experience - Ros Claase, Executive Officer to St Leonard's College - Kostas Zafeiris, Associate Provost Education - Dr Jacqueline Rose, President of Education - Emily Bannister, PGT President - Pierluigi Maffi, PGR President - Amy Elizabeth Hopkins, Academic Rep Co-ordinator - Amy McLaughlin, Postgraduate Representation Intern - Rhiannon Cadelle.

**Apologies:** Associate Provost Students - Dr Tristan Henderson, Proctor - Professor Claire Peddie.

**Note: Action Summary at the end of the document.**

**Agenda**

**I. Welcome and Introduction- 5 minutes** (President of Education)

**II. Major Corrections Policy- 15 minutes** (PGR President)

**Overview:**

Policy review: Students would like the University to consider a "major corrections" period, in line with other institutions, of 6 months. Currently, the two options are drastically different and have significant implications for students.

**Discussion:**

Is it possible for the university to explore this?

PGR President

- The difference between our institution and others is that we do not have a 6 month major correction period. Students are often given 3 months or a year to revise.
- Some students were advised to take a year, when that length of time was unnecessary for the corrections suggested, due to their teaching contracts or similar commitments.
- Students have a negative perception of taking a year for revision and resubmission - considering revise and resubmit akin to nearly failing.
- I was asked if I could raise this as a fact and find out why we do not have a major corrections period of 6 months, and whether this may be implemented going forward.

Provost

- A staff member has raised this to me. The problem some students have with accepting a year for revisions is that they do not want to be vivaed again, but this is not always the case.
- We could scope it and see what other universities have.

PGR President

- From the students I have spoken to, their undergraduate or masters' institutions have a 6 month major corrections period. Correction periods of 3 months, 6 months, or 12 months; with 12 months it is more likely the student will have an interview.
- 3 months to 12 months is a huge difference. In the discussions at the end of the viva, students have said that though there was a discussion, the panel were pushing for a year.

Associate Provost Education

- There is a provision for students to take the minor corrections over a 3 month period, and with extenuating circumstances and/or part time students can extend that period.
- This was formalised in policy a couple of years ago, we can make sure it is articulated to the examiners and students.

Executive Officer

- There is an option for 2 weeks correction period as well. 3 months indicates that the thesis is accepted, 12 months is not accepted - the correction periods indicate the academic judgement. How long you need to revise in order to be accepted, what kind of corrections do you need, and the thesis will be reexamined after this period.

PGR President

- Anecdote: students have found that a 6 month correction period is granted when the argument is not as clear in some spots in the actual writing of the thesis but has been articulated well in oral presentation.

#### Provost

- We could collect data on what happens in St Andrews.

#### Associate Provost Education

- Typically if the student knew the material in the viva but it was not clearly articulated in the thesis they would be given a 3 month correction period, but if the amount that was unclear was higher in volume then it would move to a 6 month period.
- We could reach out to the registry's network and see what other institutions are doing.

#### **Agreed Action Points**

- Associate Provost Education to flag to registry.
- Provost to look at clarifying to students that they can apply for extension beyond 3 months, remind them that this is a resource they can use.

### **III. Non-contracted Teaching- 15 minutes** (PGR President)

#### **Overview:**

The School of Medicine PGR Representative has raised that PGRs are still being expected to effectively "teach" lab health and safety to honours students but are not on a contract and are not getting paid. This was raised last year, but it appears nothing has changed. This is a matter very disruptive to student research and overall university experience.

#### **Discussion:**

Can the university investigate these claims to ensure students are properly credited for their work?

#### PGR President

- There is a clear difference between training and mentoring. Training should be paid in the same way that GTA is paid.
- There is an expectation that 1-2 months PhD students stop their research while they hold an induction for health and safety in the lab.
- From a representative point, if changes have been made, they are not working.
- Worth noting the disparity in work if your supervisor has 4-5 students that you are in charge of mentoring, or 1 student.

#### Director of Student Experience

- Looking at the minutes from last year, there was broad agreement that it is still appropriate to be asked to mentor as it is part of the experience of being a medicine student. The discussion did highlight a slight difference between mentoring and some practical skills.

- We could follow up with Cecily to see how this is working, making clear to both students and supervisors the appropriate level of mentoring.

Provost

- The expectation for overseeing and training on certain techniques should take 15 minutes at the start of the day and regular check ins throughout the day.
- A particular test or experience is guided by PhD students who have performed it regularly, but they do not receive hours of training.

PGR President

- A previous comparison that Callum made was that GTA humanities are paid. While it might be lab culture, the research students in Science are at a disadvantage.

Provost

- Lab manager should be covering health and safety, this should not be the responsibility of PhD students.

### **Agreed Action Points**

- Provost to speak to Cecily about running a training course.
- Provost to speak to Physics and Chemistry about what happens in their Schools.
- PGR President to contact Medicine PGR Rep about escalation.

### **III. Stipends and Thesis Submissions– 15 minutes** (PGR President)

#### **Overview:**

The School of Chemistry PGR Representative raised that some students lose their stipends when they submit their thesis, rather than at the end of their funding date. This means that they do not receive their stipends while preparing for the Viva.

#### **Discussion:**

Discussion into stipends and thesis submission dates.

PGR President

- Students have found that their stipend has immediately stopped or  $\frac{1}{4}$  after the submission of their thesis their funding has stopped when the thesis has been submitted early. This has led to students putting off submission until the end date.
- Some raised that if they prepare to submit early they should be paid until the viva where they are still students and researching in order to prepare for it.

Provost

- Registry is looking at this.
- In some cases, funding would cease after a certain amount of time. There is ambiguity around when stipends stopped getting paid.

- If this is affecting one student now, then we should look at getting them immediate help.

PGR President

- There seems to be anxiety in the School (Chemistry) that is influencing people to put off submission.

Associate Provost Education

- Registry has picked up action from PGRC. UKIR rules are clear on the remaining payment for the quarter, it is other funding bodies that are an issue.

Provost

- This issue is in the process of being looked at with PGRC and Registry.
- Students affected now should come forward and we can see what is happening.

### **Agreed Action Point**

- PGR President to direct students affected now to Registry.

### **V. Graduate Visa and Resit Assessments- 15 minutes** (President of Education)

#### **Overview:**

This agenda item relates to the Graduate Visa and the timing of final award ratification for masters students who resit their assessments. This topic has been brought to my attention by Glasgow University's SRC Vice President of Education.

To summarise their points: where a student resits their assessment during the August diet, they are consequently delayed in completing their dissertation. This means that their final award may not be ratified by an exam board until the following semester by which point their Student Visa has expired in January. Under current UKVI rules, they are no longer eligible to apply for the Graduate Visa.

What makes this particularly sensitive is that students who have submitted Extenuating Circumstances claims or Academic Appeals are disproportionately affected as there is a disincentive for students to use the support mechanisms they are entitled to.

"We're not raising this as an alarm more as a genuine attempt to learn from what others are doing, and to build a clearer picture of whether this is something that might benefit from a more coordinated sector-level response." - Glasgow University's SRC Vice President of Education.

#### **Discussion:**

Has the University of St Andrews ever encountered similar situations? If so, how have students been supported? Or how can we improve student support?

Have any policy or procedural changes helped in practice?

#### President of Education

- I do not know if our timelines for resits and assessments map on to Glasgow's, but have we solved this issue, and can we pass it on?

#### Executive Officer

- St Andrews has a different process, after each semester academic intervention process shows who needs to resit. Any student who has failed with resit or without has a meeting with Registry, Provost, School, and Student Services.
- We try to get students to resit as soon as possible. If the assessment was in Semester 1, then usually May or June. If Semester 2, then maybe June - based on the assessment.
- This means the dissertation is not affected as much. Hopefully the student can then submit their dissertation on the deadline or soon after.

#### Associate Provost Education

- There is a sign of process at an institutional level for the August reassessment diet. Sometimes we juggle so that the dissertation deadline moves back a month.
- The dissertation board meets in September. Whether the dissertation is completed after that or change for appeal then it will be looked at once it is double marked.
- We can run into issues of recurring delays that push the dissertation to after January, Registry does push so that students are aware they may miss Winter graduation.
- We worked with Registry last year to make sure students were notified that if you submit by this point then you would make the December graduation.

#### Executive Officer

- We implemented a few years ago support for students who do resit with the dissertation, then fail the resit that they may not be able to show something if they fail other courses.

#### Associate Provost Education

- If students passed the dissertation but failed other modules, their credits could be used towards the Postgraduate Diploma.

#### President of Education

- Glasgow has reached out to most institutions to build a case.
- I will forward this information to Glasgow University's SRC Vice President of Education.

### **VI. MSc Economics Dissertation Support- 15 minutes** (PGT President)

#### **Overview:**

Students enrolled in the MSc Economics course feel that they have limited dissertation support.

The merger between Finance and Economics has created a substantial issue regarding the dissertation module. This module was created for the dissertation for Finance, Economics, and Management with weekly lectures in the first semester. In Semester 2, there was supposed to be separate lectures for Economics, Finance and Management, but the Economics lectures were cancelled with no official email being sent out to inform students of this. This caused mass

student confusion. This issue was brought up at the SSSC, but it was not adequately addressed by the school.

As a result, students were not sure how to conduct their research or how to find a topic to analyse.

**Discussion:**

The following measure is proposed:

A staff member has a discussion with relevant staff in the school to ensure students feel better prepared for their dissertations in future years.

PGT President

- PGT Forum showed the biggest issues raised have been from the Business School, who are in the middle of a merger.
- The Economics course has had no support in the dissertation process. They have been merged with the Finance and Management course but it is not helpful for the Economics dissertation. DoPGTs of Economics have advised students not to attend, no other class has been provided for them.
- We are looking to resolve this problem for next year's cohort.

President of Education

- The Economics PGT Rep had a discussion about this in the School but staff seemed reluctant to do anything.

Provost

- The main issue here seems to be lack of communication, with no emails being sent for lectures that were canceled.
- It was raised at the PG Lunch that Economics appeared to be an afterthought.
- I am happy to go back to the DoPGTs to let them know what has happened.

Associate Provost Education

- Perhaps this should be raised with the Chair of Department because it is unclear whether the division of labor has been agreed upon by the DoPGTs since the merger.

PGT President

- It is clear the merger has caused confusion, staff are unclear what should be together and separate.

Associate Provost

- This dissertation course appears to be a weekly lecture, but in the module catalogue it says 5 sessions over the course of the year.
- The main issue here seems to be the lack of constructive response to students raising queries in the School.

## **VII. MSc Finance Module Similarity- 15 minutes** (PGT President)

### **Overview:**

Students have noticed a similarity between two compulsory modules in the MSc Finance course. One compulsory module in Semester 2 (FI5612) is almost identical to another compulsory one in Semester 1 (F15602). This matter has been raised to the DoPGT, module co-ordinator, and programme co-ordinator have been informed, but have been somewhat reluctant to engage with student feedback.

### **Discussion:**

The following measure is proposed:

A review is conducted of the similarity between these modules and relevant changes are made.

#### PGT President

- A Finance Rep reported in PGT Forum that she had sat 2 mandatory modules (one in Semester 1 and one in Semester 2) that were basically the same module.
- She raised this to her DoPGT but there has been no real engagement.

#### Associate Provost Education

- When the Business School was created, there was duplication in the existing programs, I had a look to see if this was a missed duplication.
- Registry traced back the coding changes. The modules are both now core, it used to be that one was core and one was optional.
- Looking at the module catalogue there are some echoes.
- I need subject expertise, the module handbooks and a subject expert. That conversation needs to take place to see if they should remain two modules, or if they need to merge into one 15 or 30 credit module.

#### Provost

- It is on the Business School to justify that they are not the same, possibly with an external examiner.
- I am happy to contact DoPGTs about both agenda items VI and VII, and find out how they would address this.

#### Associate Provost Education

- Happy to look at outside the scheduled meetings for review to get this sorted for next year.
- We will have to notify applicants if the modules merge into one.

#### Director of Student Experience

- There needs to be a wider discussion with student feedback, helping colleagues understand the nature of SSCCs.

#### President of Education

- Happy to speak to Claire about this.

Provost

- Lack of engagement - is this a cold SSCC, are reps being shut down - not that the feedback is not agreed on?
- We need more information on what lack of engagement looks like.
- There needs to be clarity on if a student has raised an issue then that staff member should refer the issue to the appropriate person - it should not be the responsibility of the student to do so.

### **Agreed Action Points**

- Associate Provost Education to have a conversation with the School and subject expert, with the module handbooks, to decide further action.
- Provost to contact DoPGTs about both agenda items VI and VII.
- President of Education to contact Proctor about spreading awareness about SSCCs and student feedback.

## **VIII. AOCB- 15 minutes** (President of Education)

### **a. Postgraduate Academic Rep Conference**

PGR President

- Following the Conference in January, we would like to host an academic rep conference for PG reps in the summer. The event would look at how being a representative can be fed into jobs applications or academic circles.
- Chase from SPARQS said a draft of a simulation for PGR Reps may be ready later in summer.

Director of Student Experience

- Concerned about engagement and getting staff together in summer.
- Also the language: "conference" implies a bigger event, if termed "Sparks module" or "workshop" those engaged will not be underwhelmed.

Provost

- August may not be the best for PGT engagement with a dissertation deadline, June would be ideal.
- If an afternoon event, it could be structured as a workshop focused on Sparks, then some key questions, then a talk by Careers.

PGR President

- We are keen to have events planned for the summer.
- Halls Life has increased to 3 events a week for PGs.

- We would like to test the appetite for any form of skills development or socials over the summer, the unofficial third semester. We are looking at academic adjacent events that are less formal.
- We hope that we will build enough recognition that in a couple of years PGs know there are events for them to stay around for during the summer.

Director of Experience

- It could work to have not one event but two or three: one day get Sparks in with a social to follow, then another day for a careers talk, etc.

PGR President

- Agreed, a summer series that looks at building up connections would be easier to organise and would be less of a time commitment for attendees.

## **b. Next PGAF**

PGR President

- We could have another PGAF in the summer to catch up on any issues surrounding PGT dissertations.

President of Education

- Next PGAF will be in August, for one hour, online.

**Meeting Adjourned** (President of Education)

Meeting Adjourned at 15:00pm.

## PGAF Action Summary

Action	Owner	Agenda Item
Reach out to Registry's network to see what other institutions are doing regarding the 3 month, 6 month, 12 month major corrections period.	Associate Provost Education	II. Major Corrections Policy
Look into clarifying to students that they can apply for extension beyond 3 months - reminder that this is a resource at their disposal.	Provost	II. Major Corrections Policy
Speak to Cecily about running a lab training course for medicine undergraduates.	Provost	III. Non-contracted Teaching
Speak to Physics and Chemistry about what happens in their Schools regarding mentoring and PhD students.	Provost	III. Non-contracted Teaching
Contact Medicine PGR Rep about escalation.	PGR President	III. Non-contracted Teaching
Direct students affected now, by stipends ending prematurely, to Registry.	PGR President	III. Stipends and Thesis Submissions
Contact DoPGTs about both agenda items.	Provost	VI. MSc Economics Dissertation Support. VII. MSc Finance Module Similarity
Conversation with School and subject expert, with the module handbooks, to decide on further action.	Associate Provost Education	VII. MSc Finance Module Similarity
Contact Proctor about spreading awareness of SSCCs and student feedback to DoPGs.	President of Education	VII. MSc Finance Module Similarity