



PGT Forum

St Andrews Students Association

Meeting date: Wednesday 19th November 2025 (16:00-17:00)
Small Rehearsal Room (Student Union Building)

GENERAL INFORMATION

Meeting called by: PGR President - Amy Elizabeth Hopkins

Type of Meeting: PGR Forum

Chair: PGR President Amy Elizabeth Hopkins

Note Taker(s): Postgraduate Representation Intern - Rhiannon Cadelle

ATTENDANCE

Attendees: Divinity PhD Rep - Jonathan Moore, Psychology and Neuroscience PhD Rep - Janie Fink, Computer Science PGR Rep - Jess McGowan, Classics PGR Rep - Jana Mauri Marlborough, Classics PGR Rep - Shannon Mcmillan, Earth Science PGR Rep - Grace Nielson, Photonics PGR Rep - Rhona Hamilton, Astronomy PGR Rep - Holly Seo, Art History Rep - Francesca Bisi, Business School PGR Rep - Waqas Anwar.

Online: N/A

Apologies: History PGR Rep - Michael Wang, Business School PGR Rep - Jakub Kowalczyk, Scottish Oceans Institute PGR Rep - Toms Ekmanis.

Absences: Chemistry PGR Rep - Filomena Tedesco, Film Studies PGR Rep - Rachel Ng, Geography and Sustainability PGR Rep - Gauthier Dulot, Geography and Sustainability PGR Rep - Daniela Alvarez Gallo, International Relations Year 3+ Rep - Bastian van der Neut, Mathematics and Statistics PGR Rep - Madeleine Heideman, Medicine PGR Rep - Richard Edel, Philosophy PGR Rep - Meg Gottschall, Social Anthropology PGR Rep - Israa Hatem Aljaish.

Guests: N/A

Agenda

I. Welcome and Introduction

PGR President - Hi everyone, welcome to our first PGR Forum. I think I should start by introducing myself: I am Amy Hopkins, your PGR President. Hopefully you have seen my manifesto from the elections, if you haven't I put a link in the Teams channel so you can see my priorities. Shall we do introductions around the room?

(All in attendance gave their name and representative position)

Fantastic, thank you all for coming. We have a lot to get through today so in the interest of covering everything I may be going through this quickly, but please feel free to interrupt me with questions and thoughts. First on the agenda is Expectations of Conduct.

a. Expectations of Conduct

PGR President - I want to emphasise that no one has done anything that has cause for concern, I wanted for the first meeting to quickly review the expectations of conduct so we are all clear. Primarily, just keep it respectful. We have reps here from all cohorts, with different levels of engagement between Schools and faculties, and this disparity is good to point out, but we must do so in a respectful manner. If there are issues that have been identified as giving you a hard time and it doesn't seem to be resolving, or taking any steps to get there, then I am happy for you to communicate these with me and I can take the issues to systems further up where we can work towards a resolution.

b. Training

PGR President - I am aware that not everyone could make the PGR rep training. If anyone who could attend has questions regarding the role, feel free to contact myself or Amy McLaughlin, the Academic Rep Co-ordinator. I have had a lot of questions about what exactly SSCCs are. SSCC standards for Student Staff Consultative Committees; these are channels of communication between staff and students. This is where you, as a PGR rep, would meet with your DoPGR and come up with written action points that would then be sent to us. This is not to keep an eye on you but so that we can see what the School is saying, what issues are being dealt with, what is being left, if we identify issues that have been ignored year on year then we can escalate this. You may have a meeting that includes PGT reps if their degree is more research based, but the bare minimum is that you and your DoPGR come together for a chat and there are notes from this conversation. I understand that there is some confusion surrounding the Form we sent you. There does not have to be an agenda, you can complete the Form without submitting an agenda. I know some of you may have been invited to SSCCs with undergraduates, you should not be in these meetings. You might have taught either a rep in that room or the rep will be discussing feedback from their cohort on the performance of GTAs. If

there is push back from your DoPGR for having a separate meeting please let me know, and I will send them an email that it is not within policy to have you attend these meetings.

In the interest of keeping you all up to date, we are currently in the process of updating our representative policy, it is currently making its way through different groups for approval - it has been through the PGRC and I think it is on the way to the Senate for approval. The new policy should be available to you soon. It will be much clearer in terms of the expectations of reps, and all obsolete information will be removed.

i. SSCCs, feedback mechanisms

PGR Presidents - As you all know trying to get feedback from students is vital for our role, and here, this Forum is the space to see how each School is interacting with this feedback, and what are the similarities and differences of the feedback itself.

c. The University and College Union

PGR President - If you have been a rep before then it is likely that you have heard about this in the first Forum of every year, all of you are entitled to be part of the UCU. I, myself, am part of the UCU, and I encourage you all to join. Some of the issues that will come up during the PGR Forums cannot be sorted out by the Union, for example your contracts and pay are covered by the UCU and cannot be covered by the Students' Association as a charitable organisation. What we can do is raise all issues here, and we can effect the policy that shapes how your contracts are written and hold the Schools accountable for the contracts for their GTAs. There are essentially two pillars for PGRS and Doctoral students to teach, and it does need an update and I have my eye on it for a working project in January. There is Marta who is a PG UCU rep, she is a great point of contact for GTAs and PGRs who teach. If you are getting a lot of feedback and anger in Schools concerning teaching, say that you are only a rep and that does not fall under your responsibilities, and refer them to Marta. I am happy for you to copy me into the report so I can track it along the way, but you do not have to.

There is an ongoing discussion about the UKRI stipend rates. Last year St Andrews and UKRI split, so our stipend rate is tied to inflation, not UKRI, there are a number of reasons for this. The University should publicise about the UKRI terms and conditions as well as the cost of being involved, and they will be reviewing the annual stipend. Schools are responsible for what is publicised at the stipend rates; I am aware that for Computer Science this webpage has gone.

PGR Computer Science Rep - It has.

PGR President - I have anonymised everything, but have escalated this to the Provost, and have confirmed with the Academic Registrar that we should not be publishing misrepresentation of the facts. Are there any questions so far?

Photonics PGR Rep - Regarding the UCU point, is it possible to share Marta's details with any students who contact us?

PGR President - Yes, absolutely! I did link the UCU website in the agenda, but I can also add it to the PGR Teams Channel and I can also give you Marta's email. I am meeting with Marta later on so if there is anything brought up here that cannot be resolved in this space, then I can bring it here. Just to say that you are reps, and sometimes you will be confronted with issues that are not under your purview and sometimes that you will not be comfortable with the additional work, or simply do not want to get involved with those particular issues, this is not a problem! Tell your PGRs that the UCU protects them and refer them. Any other questions?

Divinity PhD Rep - Does the Union have any SSCC minutes from previous years, or will the colleges have those?

PGR President - This is actually part of the reason why we ask you for your minutes from these meetings. In previous years, data collection has been difficult. The Schools may have a record, but so many of the SSCCs have just been chats with no written records, almost done on an honesty box system which is fine if the School has a good relationship with its reps but bad if it does not. Your DoPGR might not agree with some of the action points, there may be issues across Schools which is why we would like documentation. We are starting from a neutral point. Which brings me to handovers; if there is anything in your handovers that you want to investigate more you can contact the person who made the handover, you can ask your School, or you can look through the minutes from the old PGR Forums.

II PGR Community Initiatives

a. Postgraduate Pier Walk

PGR President - Hopefully a lot is going to happen this academic year in regard to initiating a PG community. The PGT President and myself are attempting to get the PG community, taught and research, to be more robust. This is a challenge particularly with PGTs as they are only here for a year.

Psychology and Neuroscience PhD Rep - I will also say that the St Leonard's community of PGTs feels more engaged than PGRS, despite only being here for one year.

PGR President - Show of hands, how many of you have gone to the OBS (Old Burgh School) for an event?

(Three reps raised their hands.)

Computer Science PGR Rep - I will say that us in Computer Science are a long way from OBS.

PGR President - Yes I agree, and for commuter students, and I am including those commuting from Dundee in this, do not want to get a bus to the Bus Station and then have to walk 30 minutes. I would prefer it if there were more events hosted that are not at East Sands. I understand that St Leonards have to work with what they have, and that building is what they have. The PGT President, Pierluigi, led the first PG pierwalk on St Leonard's day. For those that don't know St Leonard's day is celebrated by PGs every year, it begins with a chapel service, and normal hot drinks, pizza, beer and wine in the OBS. I suppose if you are down for the pierwalk anyway then OBS does not seem that far. We want to think of more traditions that we can start now that PGRs would be involved in, and can continue to be traditions in future years.

b. Postgraduate Space in the Union

PGR President - Pier and I have lobbied for the PGs to have a space all to themselves once a week. The space allocated to us is Beacon Bar, it has good cocktails and hilariously named shots. We are going to trial this from semester 2, opening Thursday nights for PGs. There will be a mixture of events, we are envisioning that for the first couple of hours it will be a good space for you to just grab drinks with friends, meet PGs from different courses, and then later on in the evening we will have planned events such as Jazz Works for a live music night. I was told that a rage room was not an appropriate use for the space, but the idea was pitched! Hopefully this will go on throughout the entire semester. The space has been identified as under utilised and we also decided to go for the Union so you are less likely to run into a drunk 18 year old which isn't fun anyway but more importantly you are not running into a drunk 18 year old that you teach. The Union are keen on this idea because as much as they want PGs to come in they do recognise that most PGs see the Union as a UG space. We are looking to open the bar at around 6pm, this would allow for a quick drink with your cohort after classes, or you could go home, have dinner and then come to the Union for crochet and beer night. I would appreciate any thoughts that you have on ideas for these events!

Divinity PhD Rep - I am not fond of the PG pierwalk. The normal pierwalk happens after the chapel service, so there are people from town going, it is not exactly an exclusively student based tradition. I think integration is good, like for example the May Dip, we don't need a separate PG version of the May Dip but putting resources into integration I think would be a better use of our time. And in regard to new events, I do think this is a good idea because we do need to be separate from the undergraduates that we are teaching. But I personally do not think a PG pierwalk is the best use of our resources and time.

Psychology and Neuroscience PhD Rep - I actually like the PG pierwalk on Thursday. One of the reasons why I ran for the PGR rep role was because there are so many traditions for undergraduates, but where is the culture and traditions for postgraduates? In my School it has become common knowledge that every Wednesday there will be a social event. I think perhaps we could do some more advertising of PG events earlier on, like for example we are already sending emails to PGRs then we can add a poster about Beacon Bar or other events in those emails. I think the responsibility for advertising these events will fall on us. I think as well making sure regular events are common knowledge, for example in my School people may not know

what exactly the event is but they will know it is Wednesday, and on Wednesday an event will be happening. I am happy for you to reach out to me for helping with advertising, and making posters.

PGR Rep - Thank you, I may be contacting you about that. The reason why we chose the Union was the central location and also it is one of the most recently renovated spaces.

Psychology and Neuroscience PhD Rep - Can I just add, I did go to the pierwalk. I am the Assistant Walden at one of the residences so I did not want to do the undergraduate pierwalk because I would have seen a lot of my kids there. I liked the PG pierwalk, and I like the encouragement to wear the PG gowns. The undergrads have their traditional red gowns, and we do have our own gowns but I know a lot of people do not buy them because we don't have the same events where you would wear them, so what is the point? Some PGs did wear their gowns from the pierwalk, which was nice to see and I would love to see that tradition come up more.

PGR President - I personally hate the PG gown, and it is expensive. I know a lot of people have their own gowns from UG or masters. You can also buy the PG gown, and also there is the option for you to wear the Scottish black graduation gown which is cheaper and you can get the wool ones, which are warmer. I think there should be more events and spaces for gowns to be worn.

Psychology and Neuroscience PhD Rep - Exactly, we just need more events to wear them to, to justify buying them.

PGR President - I know that the President of Student Opportunities is working on an initiative called Hand Me Gown, for PG gowns so you can rent a gown or buy a second hand PG gown. I can forward information on that to you all when it comes through. I love the idea for PGs to be able to wear the UG or masters gowns from other universities and put a St Leonard's badge on it, for recycling and reuse, and also saving money.

Divinity PhD Rep - I would be great if there was a formal meal where you can wear your gowns.

Psychology and Neuroscience PhD Rep - Or a wine and cheese night.

PGR President - Wine and Cheese is one of the events I am hoping that Beacon Bar will be having. Likely where they provide the wine, and we would bring the cheese.

Astronomy PGR Rep - Where is the money for funding these events coming from?

PGR President - I will go to St Leonards, in the first instance, for money. It is clear that OBS is not working for PGRS, and if I pitch an idea that will likely guarantee PGR attendance then there is more of a chance that they will give me money to trial events elsewhere. Last year, one of the best attended events was mince pies in 601 because it was in the middle of town. In terms of

funding for Beacon Bar, the Students' Association has agreed to fund most but I may also have to request funding from the Director of Student Experience and the Provost.

Astronomy PGR Rep - I have heard that St Leonard's have integrated with the Graduate School, and there have been some structural changes. The website previously had information about events and funding for events but it has not been updated.

PGR President - I will raise that this has not been put online.

III. University Level PGR Actions

a. TQER

b. PRES

IV. School Level Updates

PGR President - In the interest of time, let's move on to School Level updates and we can return to University Level PGR actions at the end if there is time or I can list these in the PGR Teams Channel.

Psychology and Neuroscience PhD Rep - The main topic of my feedback was the need to initiate more of a community within my School, so on Wednesdays I have decided to host alcohol free events, 5-7pm in the department building's common room for budget reasons. These events are normally low or no budget. I always ask people to bring things to share, for example for game nights, bring along games and snacks, bring extra art supplies for craft events if you have any lying about and this has helped keep costs low. Like I said earlier, today I have reserved a room with a projector for a movie night. I am planning a potluck for next week, where everyone can bring something. Occasionally we have done pub nights on a Friday. We want to create the culture of something that happens every week. Pub nights have been nice, but one of the feedback points of the survey was the desire for some events that are less alcohol orientated, a lot of people also felt quite lonely which is why we decided on alcohol free Wednesdays. I have met with my DoPGR, I am meeting the Head of School on Monday. I did also attend the first School Council meeting. It is my first year as a rep, so surveys were low on numbers, I am thinking if I print a few paper copies that I could get more responses, or if I use QR codes to hand out to those who attend events that response rates may improve.

PGR President - Fantastic, I like the alcohol free night idea.

Divinity PhD Rep - St Mary's College has a blended community with PG, UG, and staff. It is quite easy for socials, as there are lots of traditions within the College. We recently brought in mini fridges that fit on desks for PGRs, for places to store breast milk and this has been well received. We have also got baby changing facilities for the loos, for events in the Colleges. These are all quite easy as they are all movable to accommodate all. In terms of governance within the college, we have two different places with the Roundel and Bailey, both have reps which run their own events, we are working on improving that sense of community for commuter

and distance learning students, a way for them to integrate more but equally some don't want to be integrated, a lot have full time jobs, so we have let them be. The College BBQ has been moved to afternoons and there is now face painting for kids, we have made it more accommodating for families for both staff and PGRs. So overall it is a busy but easy College.

PGR President - Fantastic, I really like that you are responding to the demographic of the PGRs.

Divinity PhD Rep - Yes, PGRs make up about 10% of Divinity, a lot have young kids so we have moved events to accommodate school pick up times.

Computer Science PGR Rep - Our main issue was less about community. Computer Science seems to be happy to just be on their own, people are tired and less interested, so community is kind of an issue but not a main concern. The stipend has been a big issue, there is no consistency in what people are getting. Basically, everything is: can we get more money? The research committee has said that there is no money, and they are not sending people to conferences. Computer Science is not a big journaling discipline, so there being no money for conferences has a largely negative effect as there are not many alternatives. We do have the academic retreat at the burn. No people have come to me with any major issues at this point. My rep handover indicated that there may have been some previous issues with the DoPGR, but we will be getting a new one in January so that may solve problems for the new year.

PGR President - Keep me updated, and if you would like some help onboarding the new DoPGR, please contact me.

Classics PhD Rep (Jana) - We had two DoPGRs last year, and then one left. The one who stayed on is difficult to work with. I touched on this a bit with Callum. There were a lot of issues about transparency with scholarships given by the School. Callum raised this with Morven. There are no scholarships available for home students in Classics. It is also not disclosed anywhere about where this money is going and the reasoning behind it. There has been an issue with social things, last year we did appoint a Social Secretary within the School to have that responsibility.

Classics PhD Rep (Shannon) - I am currently standing in at the moment for our Social Secretary but having one person focused entirely on social events has been helpful. He does have a good relationship with the DoPGR and he has managed to secure verbal confirmation for funding for a conference.

Classics PhD Rep (Jana) - But our DoPGR does not believe in funding social events, that we should only ask for funding for academic events. He has been very vocal that PGRs do not need a social life.

Classic PhD Rep (Shannon) - To confirm, funding has been granted for academic social events, such as academic skills workshops where PGRs can work on designing modules for UGs, but yes, events like movie nights are still being handled by our Social Secretary but without the

support of funding. It is odd that there seems to be politics around certain events within the School of Classics.

Classic PhD Rep (Jana) - The issues with funding is something that they do not want to talk about. I have had a lot of conversations where staff have been contradicting what has been said by them verbally and what they have said in writing. There was a big thing about Classics having no money, then there was a discretionary fund that they begged people to apply for otherwise they wouldn't get that money again, and everyone applied and everyone got it. So I don't understand how they have no money and next they have so much. But mostly it is the DoPGR being difficult that is the main issue.

PGR President - Let's schedule a meeting with me and you two to talk about your DoPGR, we can also speak to the Provost.

Computer Science PGR Rep - Can I also pick your brain about the Social Secretary position? Because I cannot do both, I can't be a rep and sort out socials.

Classic PhD Rep (Shannon) - Absolutely, we can exchange contact details after.

Business School PGR - Generally students are quite happy with what is going on. There are certain areas for improvement, for example we have merged with Finance, Economics, and Management so there is more diverse research happening but there is a lack of databases for Accounting - which is my course. There are only 4 of us doing Accounting but there is a lack of database access for us. We would like more access. We have seminars every week but they are mostly focused on qualitative research. We need some more Quantitative based seminars. One student raised funding for £750 for conferences a year, and that is still not enough to travel to a conference. This is my first year as a PGR student, but when I went to a conference I met many PhD students, a lot from Europe, who had 2000 euros a year for funding conference expenses. My experiences with my DoPGR have been positive, he has been wonderful, and the issues I have just talked about, I will raise in the SSCC. We had a seminar recently by a researcher from Glasgow who talked about the hidden curriculum in PhD which he essentially said was community. Our course does weekly sessions at the end of the week, we go to the bar and socials. I am also thinking about a paper club, a bit like a book club, but to broaden horizons of student attendance. And looking forward, I would like to have a look at a Xmas budget for Xmas dinner with the DoPGR. Overall, good experiences, with no major issues but areas that need improvement.

Earth Science PGR Rep - I had a meeting with the PGRs and a lot came, bribing with cookies helps. They took the survey and then we had a discussion. In my meeting with the DoPGR we talked about demonstrating and contracts; the main issue is that the training is not relevant to the way we are expected to teach. This has created an issue where none of the first year PGRs want to demonstrate. The School is rapidly expanding, with a lot of students with Physics and Maths backgrounds doing modelling but do not have the geology background needed for UG teaching. We are doing a demonstrating panel, with about 4 of us. I personally did 90 hours of

GTA contract in my first year because a hole needed to be plugged. Hopefully by running this session, people will get the confidence to say that they can demonstrate. Then there is the issue of space within the Bute building, there are issues with allergies and air quality. The only other thing is about the lack of clarity for international PGs, and we have people from everywhere.

PGR President - There was supposed to be a PGR handbook for international students but it has not been released. It is on my list of things to push through.

Astronomy PGR Rep - We don't have any issues. We have different seminars, and socials annually. A lot of socials are hosted. We did not have many responses to the survey, although what came up the most was the rising stipend being different throughout the University. We did have complaints about not knowing who got the money. In regards to the GTA timesheet system has changed, someone mentioned in the survey that if you miss the monthly deadline, then you receive the money a month later. Time sheets are also inconsistent across Physics.

PGR President - Timesheets are inconsistent across Schools too. This could be something that we aim to standardise.

Art History PGR Rep - Our primary recurring activities include the regular PGR Research Forum where PGRs can share their research, their current projects. We are also starting a journal for PGRs so they can get editorial and publishing experience. I met with the DoPGR and we went over the survey results, where the primary and top 5 concerns were: the issue of office space, there is asbestos and roofing works, we also need to increase office space as the School is growing and the building cannot accommodate this growth. Another concern was the need for funding opportunities for professional training, specifically in art history teaching. Another issue was supervisor workloads, there has been an increase in administrative work than was initially expected, a lot have felt that not the same quality of feedback from supervisors is being received. There has been concern over the quality of the PhD experience. And also the need for streamlining the communication between the DoPGR and the PGRs, there has been a lot of miscommunication, which has caused some anxiety.

V. Any Other Relevant Business

PGR President - This concludes our first PGR Forum. Thank you so much for coming and sharing this feedback.