



PGT Forum

St Andrews Students Association

Meeting date: Tuesday 11th November 2025 (16:30-18:00)
Small Rehearsal Room (Student Union Building)

GENERAL INFORMATION

Meeting called by: PGT President - Pierluigi Maffi

Type of Meeting: PGT Forum

Chair: PGT President - Pierluigi Maffi

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

ATTENDANCE

Attendees: PGT President - Pierluigi Maffi, President of Education - Emily Bannister, Academic Rep Co-ordinator - Amy McLaughlin, Postgraduate Representation Intern - Rhiannon Cadelle, MLitt Global Social and Political Thought AV Rep - Katherine Orr, MLitt Museum and Heritage Studies Rep - Angharad Jones, MLitt Peace Building and Mediation Rep - Jessica Black, MSc Finance and Economics Rep - Hanno Eilers, MLitt Divinity Rep - Anastasia Corkesy, MSc Animal Behaviour Rep - Giulia Pipolo, MLitt Modern Languages Rep - Natalia Roguz, MSc Marine Mammal Science Rep - Shreya Vinodh, MSc Marine Ecosystem Management Rep - Marc Bonnot, MLitt International Security Studies Rep - Claire Chahbandour, MLitt Management Rep - Shahrmano Ismail, MLitt Strategic Studies Rep - Kyle Tucker

Online: N/A

Apologies: Film Studies PGT Rep - Isabella Armus, MSc Computer Science Rep - Muhammad Sarfaraz, MSc Finance Rep - Janhvi Mukerjee, MSc Economics Rep - Veronica Semprini, English MLitt Rep - Kaitlyn Mann, MLitt International Business Rep - Naomi Gibb, MLitt International Business Rep - Lukas Buser, MSc Entrepreneurship - Sarah Shaefer, Statistics PGT Rep - Jack Nowacek, MLitt Philosophy Rep - Jess Walsh, MSc Astrophysics Rep - Charlotte Bosma, Neurosciences PGT Rep - Bradley Teal, MLitt Gender Studies Rep - Meily

Denys, MSc Energy Policy and Finance Rep - Julia Hyman, MLitt Art History Rep - Natalia Ramirez

Absences: MLitt Art History Rep - Alida Kruger, PGT Chemistry Rep - Robert Gabriel Beraru, PGT Classics Rep - Joshua Woodley, MSc Geochemistry Rep - Julian Asher, MSc Environmental Science Rep - Lily Kermit, Earth Sciences MGeol - Klara Macaulay, MSc Finance Rep - Ryan Marett, History PGT Rep - Gabriel Baker, MLitt International Political Theory - Sydney Dwyer, MLitt International Security Studies - Claire Chahbandour, MLitt Terrorism and Political Violence - Rachel Dugan, MSc Finance and Management Rep - Sierra Kristine Dunbar, MSc Finance and Management Rep - Cameron Hamson, MLitt Marketing Rep - Shannon Armstrong, MSc Banking and Finance Rep Gabriel Ricardo Vargas Berroa, MSc Banking and Finance Rep - Damien Guerra Rodriguez, Mathematics PGT Rep - Axel Tardelle, Health Professions Education - Maya Gallagher, Psychology PGT Rep - Evelin Greta Csabai, MSc Global Sustainable Development Rep - Carolyn O'Donnel, MSc Health Data Science - Federica Maestri, TESOL PGT Rep - Chayanut Visawakonkal, MSc International Education Rep - Abigail Shusterman.

Guests: Art and Divinity Faculty President - Maya Fenyk

Agenda

I. Welcome and Introduction

PGT President - I would like to start by thanking you all for attending. In this meeting I really want to hear about your SSCCs, feedback to your surveys, and any issues and problems you have encountered so far. I am going to talk less this session as I would like to be led by you; so, shall we go around the room.

II. SSCC Meetings and Students' Feedback

• Overview of how SSCC meetings went

MLitt Global Social and Political Thought AV Rep - We had our SSCC very early, which was beneficial because the faculty were expecting the meeting so had a date and time scheduled, and a room booked. It was a quick process, however the downside was not picking the date ourselves so one rep was late because they had just finished class at the time the meeting was scheduled to start, and another could not attend in person. Despite this it was nice that the faculty were on it.

PGT President - Who picked the time?

MLitt Global Social and Political Thought AV Rep - The faculty of the Graduate School for Interdisciplinary Studies. We were sent the meeting agenda, listing some issues that had come up in past, as well as the date and time of the SSCC. It was frustrating for all of us as it did not leave us much time to get responses from our surveys, a lot of feedback we gathered was received after our SSCC, which were added to the agenda and minutes published. The main

feedback was the issue of lecturers' response times. Some students were not hearing from lecturers until several days later, about questions over readings and assignments. Parameters for essays were not communicated clearly - what was needed to be submitted, what it should look like presentation-wise. Also a diversity of topics; although the set readings cover a wide range of areas, geographies, etc, only certain areas are brought up in class discussions, and these are typically from the same global regions every week rather than a broader topic discussion. Another point, staff brought up in the meeting that it was an option not to have multiple staff teaching one module, where you'd have a different lecturer with different expertise each week; however, feedback reflects that students like this, so we are pushing from staff not to change this.

MLitt Museum and Heritage Studies Rep - As has already been mentioned due to the earliness of the SSCC there was less than a week to get our forms out. I had a class finish at the start time of the meeting so I had to rush across town. Survey responses reflected that students were overall happy with the course. A few minor things came up; first was that there was a lot of reading being set, not much of it was discussed in class, whilst seminars shouldn't be all about readings, there was a lot of feedback desiring more discussion. Communication issues also came up; a lot of students struggled to contact staff. Students also want more personalised feedback on assignments. They also feel that they are not part of the community here as postgraduates. This is in Interdisciplinary school specifically, but likely a uni-wide issue, students are not feeling at home, they do not know the lecturers, and are feeling lost. For postgraduates, it is almost a bit of a gray area, not knowing where we stand with the uni, and I think being a part of the Interdisciplinary school adds to this. We get emails from Art History, and we do not do Art History. But overall positive feedback.

MLitt Peace Building and Mediation Rep - I was not informed about the prep and planning of the SSCC. I was made Rep a bit later in the semester. I do not have access to the minutes and agenda of the meeting, so I am going off my personal notes. Most feedback was really positive. The reading lists have been relevant to class discussion. Most students were happy with the class split, 40% lecture 60% discussion. There were three main concerns: there have been previous issues with mediation training, confusion over it, staff are planning for next year some funding and support. Assignment support at the beginning of the year is needed. Staff do not want to give too much feedback as they do not want students to stop being creative. There is a lack of awareness about accessibility issues. When guest lectures are occurring rooms have not been accessible to students who need these accommodations. When we informed the faculty of this issue, their suggestion was to ask for the lecture to be recorded if an attendee could not physically access the room.

PGT President - Thank you very much. I know that you have just been co-opted, but the feedback you have presented is very useful. So, thank you.

MSc Finance and Economics Rep - Our first SSCC was a month ago. It was organised by the Head of the Business School, we have elected a chair so they will organise the SSCCs from now on. We got a lot of feedback, mostly about specific lectures. Examples include: time

between lecture and tutorials, excessive reading load, panopto not being available to students. A lot of good staff feedback was mentioned, for example students are strongly encouraged to use office hours, and not only just before tests. Overall good feedback.

MLitt Divinity Rep - Due to my DoPGT being unwell we had to push back our SSCC. I am meeting with her tomorrow and the School President of the undergraduates for a group meeting, then afterwards myself and the DoPGT will have a one to one meeting. I will then send out the feedback form, and speak to the cohort before the semester ends. So far the feedback I have gotten is that communication is good, there is a good sense of community within the School, professors are readily available, there are not any big issues. That is where we are right now.

MSc Animal Behaviour Rep - We had a group meeting with the three biology masters' reps. It went smoothly, the staff who arranged it made sure that us, as reps, did not have any classes so that we could attend the meeting. We mainly discussed course specific things, as we did not get much uni wide feedback, apart from panopto recordings not working and lecturers having to continue without sufficient recordings. There have been timetabling issues with insufficient rooms being booked - for example, one seminar had a room booked to accommodate 6 people and there were 14 of us. I have been asked to push this. There was a 3rd year well-being officer in our SSCC meeting which was good. We had the meeting yesterday, so as late as possible, and we have had many responses. But we do not have access to the minutes or agenda yet.

MLitt Management Rep - I attended the same SSCC, as mentioned it was well organised by Julie. Most, if not all, reps were able to attend. More module co-ordinators could have been present; 2 out of 4 of my course module co-ordinators attended. This is quite specific to the MLitt, we have 3 hour lecture and supervision in one, no breaks. We went over the rules for that, and Julie said that for a 3 hour class we should have 2x 15 minute breaks. Office hours were scheduled during other classes, but the module co-ordinators present changed their hours in the SSCC. General feedback included slides on Moodle not being updated. Reading lists for different modules have not been synchronized or hard to find. Everyone in the meeting did good answering questions. It was a long time ago now, quite early in the month, so not much else to say. We have just gone through around of assessments, and there will be a second round next week so we will likely hear more from students from now on.

MLitt Modern Language Convenor - When it comes to the feedback forms, a lot of feedback on the structure of the modules and what has been told is too basic, and not specific enough. A lot of feedback on how the programs are structured. The cohort is mostly happy. When it comes to SSCC, we have not had one yet. I was confused because I am the only rep for modern languages so I was wondering if it is okay to join the SSCC with the undergraduates.

PGT President - Yes, absolutely.

MLitt Modern Language Convenor - I know there is one planned, so it may be easier for everyone if I go.

PGT President - Yes, we actually very much encourage that PGTs go in with either the PGRs or UGs, so please feel free to do so. It might be the case that your course is very small so you have much less feedback, and so it does not make sense for you to have one alone.

Academic Rep Co-ordinator - Just to add, make sure you are inviting you DoPGTs to these meetings, because if they are already arranged by the UGs then they will not automatically be invited. So, it would be up to you to extend that invitation.

MLitt Modern Language Convenor - Would this be your module co-ordinator?

Academic Rep Co-ordinator - You can invite your module co-ordinators as well; so you would extend invites to your DoPGT and relevant module co-ordinators.

MSc Marine Mammal Science Rep - We were in the same biology SSCC. But the main thing that came up for us in feedback forms were issues with the Panopto recordings, lack of access to it.

MSc Marine Ecosystem Management Rep - Again, we were in the same SSCC. The professors said they had raised issues about Panopto, and requested that we also bring it up as an issue - thinking pressure from all sides might work. For example, the audio stops so they have to continue without. The cohort is mostly happy; lots of responses on the feedback form. Mostly going well. There are some issues with individual modules but nothing great that is worth raising.

MLitt International Security Studies Rep - Not a ton of responses to our feedback forms. A few things were brought up; the main one was students not feeling confident about the expectations of PG level writing. Professors brought up IELLI. I do not think a lot of people know about or know how to utilise these resources. There was a request for Careers Centre to have more PG specific things, as PGs were not sure where to find relevant things if there are resources for specific PG career development. Otherwise, people are happy.

MLitt Strategic Studies Rep - I am sure other people in IR have addressed this earlier. My program is particularly productive, we spoke to the program convenor about more interactive seminars, and having extracurriculars to engage with the subject outside of the course. He brought up a £100 student development fund, or empowerment fund. I was not previously aware of this fund but he said he would work with me and other students to have movie nights and policy simulations, which were requested to be more involved with the materials as our seminars are more abstract. There is a lack of exemplars in the class room. Our first set of grades came back for 2 core modules. One professor is incredibly strict on format, so if a student deviated they would be massively marked down, on the other hand the other professor did not care about format. When I brought up that there is not a clear exemplar, the response was that professors do not want to stifle creativity; but if one has a strict requirement, and students seem to be punished for being more creative. It was unclear for the first assignment, and this is 50% of our grade for both modules. Where the professor was more strict on format the grades were

collectively worse for that assignment when compared to the other module. For the more positive side, we are working on making the community more interactive. And we could use more exemplars for certainty on expectations more broadly.

PGT President - Thank you for your feedback. I am going to share what the MSc Computer Science Rep has forwarded to me, as he could not attend today but wanted to share his feedback. He noticed from the SSCC that there are too many readings in his course, and there is not a clear distinction for knowing what was for the exam and what is supplementary reading, making it hard to manage the already heavy work load for the fast paced semester. Again, we only have a year to become familiar with different professors, different ways of grading, and a different university system. He was saying the density of things is not supported, as many of you have said, there is not clear staff guidance and clear expectations for essays and exams. This has been raised a lot around this table, and I think it is definitely something that we should work on. In my department, IR, there is no guidance on assignments because they also want us to develop our own voice. But that does not work when we are marked down for formatting. This is definitely something to look into.

Additional reminder that SSCCs should be decided by reps. If the faculty does pick a date and it does not work for you, tell them it doesn't work and suggest another date in the future.

• **Problems and questions**

PGT President - For issues with Panopto. I think Emily is working on this.

President of Education - Yes, I am working on this and it is a mega piece of work. There are two parts to this; first is that the technology itself is not working, IT are doing an audit of the technology in each room that the uni has, the other side is training for staff on how to use the tech in their classrooms. This is run by IT services but is not very well utilized. IT do run an intense training, where they take the staff to their own room and teach them how to use the tech in their room, but the staff are not using it. I assume we are all familiar with the cards in the library for noise and number, we are working on a similar card which will have a newly set up number for IT that students can text to say that the tech is not working and someone will come and fix it. This should hopefully alleviate the 20 minutes at the start of the class, battling with the tech. So many issues that we are having are coming down to the issue of lecture captioning, particularly for commuters and people with additional needs who rely on this technology, it is not consistent. So we are working on it.

PGT President - Same thing regarding room capacity, we recognise this is a big issue. Emily is doing all that she can to address it. Some people are taking classes in their dorms, we are hoping this will eventually get better. Is everyone happy to move on, or are there additional points people would like to raise?

MLitt Global Social and Political Thought AV Rep - Something we talked about last forum was allowing broader spaces for PGs, for example Beacon Bar and making that a PG space a few times a week. As Angharad said, students are feeling isolated, that their cohort is isolated, and not engaging with related PGs or other PGs from different courses. Are there any updates, perhaps for this semester that I can relay to students?

III. PGT Community Initiatives

• Beacon Bar as a postgraduate space

PGT President - Yes, thank you. That moves us on to the third point on the agenda. Beacon Bar, should be open to PGs once a week. We are 90% on the right track for this happening. It is a big thing, there are a lot of financial considerations, so the date the Union has given us around February. I think it may be the first Thursday in February, so we are on track to open after the break. We can't before as there are so many things we have to do right for us to be able to do it, and we need to make sure it is right the first time around so it can be something good that can continue in the future. As I have mentioned before we are thinking one night a week, likely a Thursday night, so it does not clash with Union events, Beacon Bar will be open to PGs only. We will host different nights like a DJ night, pub quizzes; please text me if you have any more ideas.

MLitt Divinity Rep - Is this going to continue through the summer or is it just throughout the academic year?

PGT President - I am unsure, as the Union has different rules.

President of Education - The Union is weird in summer, it doesn't really stay open. It might open over the summer, but traditionally it does close with maybe opening 3 nights a week. If there is interest, and demand, especially good turn out at the PG nights in Beacon Bar, that could be a great case to present to the Union for staying open for these events over the summer.

PGT President - I agree that if we could keep the space over summer, that would be great. We will see next semester.

MLitt Peacebuilding and Mediation Rep - Is Beacon Bar lift accessible?

PGT President - Yes, it is. For other updates on community. Last Thursday we did the first ever PG pierwalk, which was great. We then had a gathering at Byre Theatre after to meet people on different courses, and start to build a community. I am doing my best to create this PG community that we are lacking, helping to get PGs to come together as there are not many opportunities for it. I don't think there will be time for similar events before the Christmas break; we have just 2 weeks left of classes, then the exam period, and then people will be leaving. So I think from next semester we can plan more for PGs.

President of Education - Pier is doing lots of work on general PG activities. But if you want to host events for your cohort, there is some funding available. I will put a link in the Teams channel. This funding is open to all students, and reps are prioritised. I handle some of the funding approvals so I can promise you that reps are prioritized. EDI fund, I recommend, there is the Enhancement Theme Funding for student events, Student Activities fund, great to explore as the Uni are particularly keen on PG funding at the moment. Each fund has a different pot of money, usually around £1000. The Union one is around £50 so we can give a variety of funding, however if your event is incredible we can work something out so it is more.

Academic Rep Co-ordinator - Each School also has funding for you, as reps, so do ask your admin or DoPGT for further information.

President of Education - There are also dedicated pots of money for careers events.,

MLitt Management Rep - I had a request about how students are being informed about these events. I know we get emails as reps and have been passing them on but I am wondering if it would be better if all PGs get the email, in case we miss it and also so they definitely don't miss it, that way our emails would be a reminder. I was surprised that for the pierwalk only we got the email; I think it would be better to circulate to all PGs for the Beacon Bar nights.

PGT President - This is a good idea. I did not have access to all the PG emails but I think that is in the works.

Academic Rep Co-ordinator - I have spoken to IT, so you should have access soon.

PGT President - I will have a look. Also the pierwalk was quite a quick turn around so it was not enough time to advertise and we will work on that in the future.

MLitt Peacebuilding and Mediation Rep - Are the pierwalk photos available to be accessed?

PGT President - Yes, they should be posted on the Uni website. Under the section Media and Photographs, there should be plenty. You can search for what you are looking for. If they are not up yet, they will tell me a date for uploading and I will let you know. There are not many pictures of PGs on the Uni website, so we are trying to change that.

MLitt Management Rep - In terms of specific funding, what are some of the events others have organised?

President of Education - They can be so random. We had one a few years ago where the School President of Classics ran a pantomime. People plan BBQs, conferences, coffees, anything you want. I would say if you are going for something more academic then go for Uni funding, if it is more informal like a BBQ then go to the Union.

Academic Rep Co-ordinator - I do have a random list from last year. Some people did a Supervisor Meet and Greet where students could meet different staff and see suitability for their dissertations, there were informal hangouts such as Secret Santas, film nights, PGT Xmas Coffee, dinners, Wing Wednesdays at the Rule and BrewCo, summer socials. We can't guarantee the Union summer timetable, but we do recommend planning some summer events. There were also research method workshops and careers events planned.

PGT President - Quick point, last time we spoke about dissertation guidance. I have raised this issue with the Provost and this should be taken care of since the Uni is now aware.

MLitt Management Rep - Is this under St Leonard's or each department?

President of Education - Provost has the power to influence other Schools, so other Schools should follow.

MLitt International Security Studies Rep - I am interested, how are different departments handling dissertation training? We start in January.

PGT President - A lot starts in January, and a lot of departments refuse to give advice or guidance before January.

MLitt Management Rep - In the Business School we have had dissertation workshops since Week One.

MLitt Divinity Rep - For our course we need to submit a few sentences on our proposed dissertation topics before winter break.

MSc Marine Ecosystem Management Rep - We pretty much get nothing.

MLitt Modern Language Convenor - We had to write a huge project this semester that we could use for our dissertations. But overall there is a lack of guidance.

PGT President - It is clearly a different process for each faculty, and we are hoping to make it more standardised where possible and to have more guidance. I have taken this issue to the relevant people so hopefully we have a change.

MLitt Peacebuilding and Mediation - I know that MLitt courses have a scheduled talk in Week 10.

MLitt International Security Studies Rep - We did receive an email saying that it was an email before getting the email with the dissertation session information.

MLitt Strategic Studies Rep - Any date?

MLitt Peacebuilding and Mediation - Just planned for Week 10, for MLitt generally.

MLitt Museum and Heritage Studies Rep - There is an invite in my calendar for an introductory dissertation session on the 20th, within the Grad School.

PGT President - There is clearly a lot of confusion surrounding this, and we are hoping to resolve this issue.

IV. Representatives' Issues and Advice

- **Discussion of potential issues in various courses**
- **Discussion about possible solutions and shared advice**

PGT President - I was thinking we can discuss some of the issues that you have encountered in your role as representatives, it is likely that others are tackling similar issues so it may be good to share and get advice from others. Does anyone want to start?

MLitt Management Rep - I do not have official feedback yet but there is one specific module that everyone is not having a good experience with. How do I bring this up to the module co-ordinator? All the feedback is about the one module co-ordinator and their teaching, would I speak to them directly?

President of Education - Yes, I had to do this today. I would suggest going to them yourself. It is not nice for staff to receive constant negative feedback in a meeting like your SSCCs. Give them the option for you to chat in the SSCC or set an alternative meeting, which is your preference, to discuss this. Any students who gave feedback and are happy to attend, it could be good having one or two of them with you rather than just a one on one to present the case.

MLitt Divinity Rep - I am glad you said that, I was also going to suggest that it would be good to have another person who can say this is a shared experience amongst peers and should avoid a messy interaction.

MLitt Strategic Studies Rep - What should be our responsibilities for the coming weeks and over winter break. Are we on pause until January, for the most part or is there anything we should keep an eye on?

PGT President - Not really on pause but it is not a particular problem if there is nothing for you to address. Remember that it is not within your role to be responsible for students' wellbeing. If someone does present an issue to you, be present, address it or forward it to the relevant people. Apart from that, keep an eye out for emails from me.

MLitt Strategic Studies Rep - Second question. I had difficulty getting people to respond to surveys, 3 out of 14 responded including me. Some people did speak to me in-person. I am more concerned for the Spring as we do not have core modules, so concerned that there will be

even less feedback because I will not see everyone. Are there any recommendations to increase response rates?

PGT President - Definitely can run after people, grab them before or after lectures and ask them to fill it out. Standing in communal spaces.

President of Education - In Spring the form system is going to change. The feedback forms will be done in partnership with the Uni, so the burden of distributing is on them. This should be around the middle of the semester; you will be asked to help, there will be specific questions then 4 additional questions where you will be asked to contribute, then the Uni will push for responses. You can still ask people to fill out the form. A good idea is cup-cakes, we have just done that to get people to fill out a form. You can get funding from the Students' Association for the cupcakes. But in the Spring it will be easier for you; and students will get constant emails until they fill out the form so that should boost response rates.

Academic Rep Co-ordinator - Do you have a group chat?

MLitt Strategic Studies Rep - Yes, and I did send a message.

President of Education - Do the cupcakes; you will often see me outside the library with cupcakes and I promise it does work.

MLitt Museum and Heritage Studies - I used Haribos at Halloween, and they really worked.

Academic Rep Co-ordinator - I have a quick friendly reminder that one of your responsibilities as rep is to once you've had your SSCC and received your minutes, to communicate with your cohort and close the feedback loop.

President of Education - I also want to emphasize that even in my role there is not much over Christmas - this is normal! It is a good time to think about goals, and personal things that you want to achieve.

Academic Rep Co-ordinator - Is everyone on Teams?

PGT President - If anyone is not on Teams, please come to us at the end so we can add you.

MLitt Divinity Rep - To confirm, are we circulating the minutes and the agenda of the SSCC?

Academic Rep Co-ordinator - Just the minutes but you can send the agenda as well if you wish.

MLitt Global Social and Political Thought AV Rep - The PG SSCC Forms you sent round asked for both the agenda and minutes.

Academic Rep Co-ordinator - Yes, this is for us.

V. Any Other Business

PGT President - Any final points?

President of Education - Just quickly, Main Bar Survey is happening. The Main Bar has not really become the student hub that we wanted it to be, so we want to transform it into something the students want and we need input to do that. The survey is 2-5 minutes long, to make the Main Bar downstairs a go-to, even for just as a study space if that is what people want. Survey is linked on the Union website and on several Instagrams. Please can you all take the time to complete it, we have very few PG responses and we want to hear what you want.

PGT President - I will share the link in the Whatsapp group chat. Thank you all for coming and I look forward to seeing you next year.