



Postgraduate Taught Forum

Tuesday 29th November, 3:00pm

Microsoft Teams

Agenda

Attendance: Noah Schott, Kait Havens, Aimee Bebbington, Charles Warren, Chase Greenfield, Frank Muller, Jacqueline Rose, Sandro Eich, Callum Irvine, Iain Cupples, Ancy Anna John, Juan Yang

Apologies: Hazel Grapes

Minutes: Toni Andres

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Welcome, Introduction, and Apologies (Postgraduate Academic Convenor)

- Sandro gives apologies and asks for confirmation of agenda. Agenda is confirmed unanimously.

Officers' Updates

- Distance and Part-Time – Rebecca Munro: *absent*
- Graduate Teaching – Aimee Bebbington
 - o General organization has been going very well, overall positive feedback. GTA contracts pose great improvements.
 - o Issues that have been raised
 - Training has not been going well, particularly asynchronous modules. → Aimee has confirmed that the current module on teaching online is going to be replaced with a longer synchronous teaching module.
 - Students would like to see School-specific guidance, particularly students who came from different universities, on MMS and Moodle and how to increase student engagement via Moodle and MMS
 - Insufficient time for marking and preparation: flexible assignments are difficult, vague marking rubrics, tutors with disabilities are particularly experiencing difficulties.
- International – Juan Yang: *absent*
- BAME Officer Arts & Divinity – Khadija Ali: *absent*
- BAME Officer Science & Medicine – Ancy Anna John
 - o Ancy has been collaborating with the BAME Students Network on organizing events.
 - o To improve in the future: creation of a contact and mailing list for better communication. This will be focused on next semester.
- Disabilities Arts & Humanities – Kait Havens
 - o Most common issue is understanding how to receive necessary accommodations and support. Students do not feel comfortable with how it is stated in matriculation, while MMS and Moodle are confusing to students.
 - Kait has been working with the Rectors Committee and EDI Committee to address accessibility as being communicated more clearly.
 - o Frank asks for clarification on where the threshold and obstacles are. Sandro asks for this to be moved to the later discussion.

Postgraduate Taught Matters

OBS-desk allocation for PGT students (PGAC)

- 22 PGT allocated desks for commuting students were organized by Hazel. This has been well-received.

Extension policies and coursework deadlines (PGAC)

- Issue: many deadlines ended up being in the same week which was brought up at PGAF. This will be discussed at AMG this week. Sandro emphasizes that the PG situation is different than for UG since PG students do not take modules across schools. For this reason, organization takes place within each School.
 - o Frank emphasizes that the PG Programme Directors should be contacted about this. Frank offers to write to Programme Directors about this issue.
 - o Callum thanks Frank and asks for distribution and balance of deadlines.
- Sandro asks for clarification on how deadlines are set. Frank clarifies that there is no central committee, and this is dependent on each Programme.
- Jacqueline adds that the programmes differ between schools. For new programmes, coordinators are asked to submit preliminary deadlines.
- Kait brings up that PhD deadlines should also be taken into consideration when deadlines are planned. Kait brings up an example of where coursework deadlines are in the same week as PhD deadlines. Sandro thanks Kait for the point and points out that overall deadlines for a current course cannot be moved for applications for future things and emphasises that this would be considered on an individual basis.

Updating Student Handbooks during the semester (PGAC)

- Issue: Students have brought up that when handbooks are updated, students are not notified about this. Students ask for a universal procedure of communication.
- Frank points out that there is no central library of module handbooks.
- Sandro clarifies that the Talis reading lists show up as updated and raises if these reading lists could be utilized for module handbooks. Frank will look into this.

Publication of timetables for Semester 2 (PGAC)

- Issue: A rep from PGAF brought up that they do not have their timetable for the second semester yet. Sandro asks if there is a process in place that regulates when timetables are released.
 - o Frank clarifies that this is a centralized process. Frank points out that the app gives a personalized timetable. Noah clarifies that the student app is not widely used because of various issues when it was

published.

- Jacqueline reaches out to Timetabling to ask for clarification on this. Later reply: 'It (the timetable) won't be released to students until January as there will be changes made by Schools & information changes.'

Maths & Stats: Additional provision of foundation skills (PGAC)

- Issue: Foundational skills are offered by the School of English; these workshops are funded by CEED. These are provided by the School and offered to UG students. A need for this came up in the School of Maths & Stats. Sandro raises if this scheme could be extended to School of Maths & Stats.
 - Frank: these exist in the School of Maths & Stats, but only for UG and PGT. They cannot be extended to PGRs because they are taught by PGRs. There is an existing module by an external provider which has been recommended: <https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/pgstudents/stleonards/training/research/statistics/>

Timing of MEQs (PGAC)

- Issue: the final submission deadline for coursework is after MEQs' submission deadline even though MEQs ask about feedback. This specifically applies to dissertation modules.
 - Callum adds that this has been an issue for a while. Callum points out that this is an important part of data that for this reason always lacks.
- Low participation versus student feedback: Frank points out that this is a toss-up between student experience and participation rates. Students are more likely to engage with MEQs during the semester. As for dissertation modules, these have separate MEQs at the end of the degree – which has atrocious participation rates. Frank offers to run a pilot project of a different timeline but expresses hesitation due to already low participation rates.
 - Sandro adds that for future participation rate calculations, the size of programmes should be considered.
 - Chase adds that many modules on PGT level have only one assessment which is due after feedback and MEQs which means that these students cannot evaluate feedback at all. Hence, for some programmes it may be more beneficial to tailor the questionnaires to programmes as opposed to changing the timeline.
 - Callum adds that some students do not trust that the university takes survey results seriously, based on Callum's past research on unresponsiveness. This may account for low take-up rates.
- Communication of MEQs: Sandro asks if MEQs could be raised during matriculation in order to raise awareness and make communication transparent; they could be communicated as an essential part of programme.
 - Chase adds that communication is key, particularly regarding changes

- that were enactments on feedback. A solution could be the module handbook to show what changes had been made to the module.
 - Callum proposes a change log that displays changes to reading lists which has reflected well on Schools for being active and engaging.
 - Jacqueline raises that Schools are encouraged to put this into handbooks but there is no consistent protocol. Some Schools are doing that already, others are not.
- *Question* (Noah) are handbooks publicly available? *Answer* (Charles): they are internally available, but not publicly – which would violate intellectual property laws.

President's Update (PGR President)

- Callum: the collaboration with St Leonards College has been going well. Spaces have been provided. Callum has been working on student experience-related issues, mainly accommodation.
 - Main issue: provision of office spaces for PGRs. The Old Burgh School does not have private offices, the university has been taking away spaces. This poses difficulties for those teaching regarding office hours and grading because the content is sensory material.
- Frank responds: North Street was rented by the university. With rent increase it could not be paid anymore. The Old Union Diner is PG space now with offices for people of 4-6. Frank found many office spaces unused. New College is being built at the moment which will contain dozens of PGR-dedicated office spaces.
- PG space versus PG office space: Sandro emphasizes that one issue is that PG spaces are not an issue but PG *office* spaces which means that the functionality of office spaces is at the center of discussions. Sandro encourages to keep this in mind for future PG Office spaces. A functional office space is one with a higher degree of privacy that allows for one-on-one conversations.
- Frank raises that some staff do not even have offices.
 - Callum emphasizes that this is not the issue at hand and that staff indeed should also have office spaces. Callum emphasizes that the university is in a position to create these spaces.
 - Sandro emphasizes that a lot of changes have been made in the past years. Sandro thanks Hazel and Frank for facilitating these changes.
 - Frank emphasizes that PGR students should first and foremost be supported in their research experience. The teaching experience is an additional duty that they take on. This puts the process of facilitating meeting space on the students. Frank adds that individual office spaces are not in the future of architecture for learning spaces. This is also not sustainable for buildings since this space will not be used during summer breaks.

- Aimee adds that closed office spaces are often more coveted than open collaborative spaces. Aimee adds that it is not only privacy but also the issue of not disturbing anyone else in the space. Aimee emphasizes that it is a mixture of those spaces that should be considered.

Postgraduate Research Matters

Graduate Teaching Assistant Training (PGAC, PG GTA Officers)

- Issue: Sandro emphasizes the need for School-specific, tailored training. This is being organized in the School of Modern Languages for Language Classes and Literature Classes. Callum adds that there is a discrepancy between Schools which poses a need for Best Practices of Training.
 - Jacqueline clarifies the policy: there is mandatory centralized training. However, proper support is needed: appropriate training is expected to be part of this. Jacqueline emphasizes that the central question is: What needs to be covered by the policy so that the implementation is changed, or does the policy need to be changed?
- Frank proposes a forum for best practices of training with all schools.
 - Aimee adds that most GTAs seem comfortable to talk with staff about this. Aimee agrees with Frank on implementing a forum. Aimee points out that the main issue is organizational and specific to St Andrews.
 - Sandro agrees that the St Andrews teaching experience is quite unique which needs clearer communication. Sandro asks if there is any existing space that could be utilized for this forum.
 - Frank notes that any for a (PGR forum) could work. Frank emphasizes that there is a risk in centralizing any teaching processes as they may restrict local flexibility.
 - Chase suggests that the policy could set out a floor but may have an uncapped ceiling to counteract restrictions to local flexibility
 - Sandro clarifies: School-specific training is what was asked for. Quality assurance within Schools.
 - Jacqueline suggests sharing routes across Schools as the first step. Jacqueline suggests bringing all DoPGRs together to share best practice examples.
- Chase adds that this was brought up in Teaching Awards report. This will be presented next semester and is available on the students association website: <https://www.yourunion.net/pageassets/representation/academic/teaching-awards/Teaching-Awards-Final-Report-2022-23-Pakhomova.pdf>

PGR Support Fund Process Update (PGAC)

- Sandro relates that students have been asking about the fund. Student

Services clarified that some cases are still being assessed due to their complexity. People are now being paid; applications are going through. Sandro relates that students were very appreciative of the money. However, the timing of communication was during the UCU meeting with GTAs which may have caused a negative demeanor.

Co-Tutelle during the cost-of-living crisis (PGAC, PGR President)

- Issue: How can a global decision be made that does not require to look into individual cases? Sandro emphasizes the need for a Co-Tutelle wide policy change that in extenuating circumstances there is no moving required.
 - o Jacqueline responds: the initial proposal involves a lot of moving back and forth which has cost implications. Initially the agreement was written during COVID-19 pandemic. Issues now arise once the agreement is signed. Due to complexities of individual situations, it is difficult to create one wide policy. The current approach is a personal route to speak with individual tutors.
 - o Frank suggests a panel for global PhD funding. Frank emphasizes that especially for Sciences, equipment makes situations unique and particular. Negotiations on how to examine render this even more complicated.
- Sandro asks for clarification on liaison of potential (individual) issues.
 - o Jacqueline responds: the line of contact is student – supervisor – DoPGR – Global Office – Jacqueline Rose.
 - o Sandro emphasizes that this needs to be signaled to PGR students

Tutoring on Interdisciplinary Modules (PGAC)

- Issue: Some students had a bad experience regarding what issues fall under whose responsibility concerning administrative issues. Sandro asks for statistics on Interdisciplinary Modules (particularly Great Ideas modules)
 - Frank emphasizes that Interdisciplinary Modules vastly vary which makes it tricky to address issues uniformly. This should be brought to module coordinator's attention and DoPGT on an individual basis.
- Charles has coordinated an Interdisciplinary Module and emphasizes that the coordination is always a challenge. The clear distribution of responsibility is therefore the most urgent issue.
- Jacqueline adds that it might be worth to add this in the policy to clarify structures of responsibility.

Provost's Office Updates (Provost, Associate Provost Education, Association Provost Students)

- Frank:
 - The Provost Office is hiring for a separate role holder to look after

the University's engagement with the Graduate School for Scottish School of Arts and Humanities.

- Studentship awards are being processed
- Funding for seating in Old Burgh School is being pursued

Any Other Competent Business (AOCB)

- Sandro: information about the Russell trust is not online yet. Sandro asks Frank to chase up about this. This does not show up on MMS as something students can apply to. Frank promises to look into this.