



PGT Postgraduate Executive Forum Minutes

12th April 2018, 3pm

Students' Association Committee Room

Present:

Member

Position

Ashley Clayton	Incoming PG Academic Convenor (Chair)
Andy Murphy	Provost
Martin Campbell	Pro-Dean PGT
Zachary Davis	Director of Education
Joanna Thornborough	Academic Policy Officer Research – In place of Alexander Griffiths
Monique MacKenzie	Deputy Director of Graduate School
Cameron Rice	PG Society Secretary/Chemistry PGR Exec Rep.

Coco Smith	Classics
Arnold Haidu	Computer Science
Rebeca Dimitrov	Divinity
Lauren Bellatti	English
Sophia Silverman	History
Lisa Maria Frending	Psychology & Neuroscience
Neil Hampshire	Social Anthropology

1. Apologies:

Lorna Milne	Proctor
Douglas Philp	Dean of Science
Brett Dodgson	Director of Graduate School
Fanny Empacher	Outgoing PG Academic Convenor
Alexander Griffiths	Academic Policy Officer (Taught)

Julia Madore	Art History
Mikhail Barabanov	Biology
Toby Boocock	Earth Sciences & Geology

Mehdi Chajadine	Economics & Finance
Willa Grefe	Film Studies
Luveshni Odayer	Geography & SD
Laura Bolder	IR
George Kontaxis	Management
Jake Haycocks	Mathematics & Statistics
Aliya Ali	Medicine
Manuel Haeussermann	Modern Languages
Kim Kopec	Philosophy
Daniel Hannaway	Physics & Astronomy
Parawee Khluensanan	ELT
No PGT representative	Chemistry

2. Introductions:

All attendees introduce themselves to the room.

Approval of previous Minutes:

Minutes of the previous meeting are approved without alteration.

Action Points arising from previous meeting – Orientation and Advising:

An Orientation Symposium was held in January to discuss the restructure of the orientation process.

The learning and teaching committee announced that reading lists should be made available earlier in the orientation and advising process.

These and some other changes to orientation and advising processes will be under review until December 2018.

The Postgraduate Society plan to hold Academic Family ‘Adoption’ events for incoming PGs.

Following discussion of the issue at the previous meeting, the Proctor emailed departmental heads to reiterate the point that coursework deadlines should not be placed during reading weeks.

- Amendment to agenda. Additional topic of PGT Experience to be discussed as Point 3 of meeting - see below.

3. PGT Experience:

Provost - Following feedback at the last meeting, the Proctor wrote to department heads to reiterate that feedback on coursework and assessments should be provided within the stipulated timeframe. Please let the provost know if these deadlines are still being missed.

The Pro-Dean for PGT has set up an additional focus group to monitor PGT Experience. The group aims to talk to PGT students and directors of PGT to discuss the best practice for orientation. The university is aware that the PGT experience requires significant overhaul and so the time frame for this is open-ended. Some items, however, have already been agreed.

Mandated items to tell academic schools to change now:

1. The timescale for issuing reading lists, handbooks, etc. should be standardised across departments. It is to become compulsory that students receive these at least four weeks in advance of the start of their studies.
2. Postgraduate course handbooks should be issued and should contain information on; the electronic resources available, details of lecture recordings, course and grade mark breakdowns as well as published deadlines for feedback.

Additional items that the focus group have highlighted to be considered:

1. Academic schools should have a single point of contact for PG students to talk to if they have any concerns with academic or non-academic matters. This point of contact should be able to send students in the right direction.
2. Some schools use a Facebook welcome group. This can be advertised in a welcome handbook as either a Student & Staff, or Student only group.
In Biology, for example, graduates of the degree programme remain a part of the Facebook group and can be useful points of contact.
3. Academic schools should host course-specific events and workshops. Economics host their own ‘Econ Ball’ and maths refresher courses, whereas History offers a Manuscripts Workshop.

4. Spreading Workload. There can be a lot to take in at the start of the academic year. Departments should consider spreading out orientation events, etc.
5. Schools with a large number of PGs should also consider appointing their own PG representative to sit in on SSCC meetings.
6. Schools should remind PGT students of the group work/collaborative working/study spaces available to book within their department or the university.

Any other ideas sent an email to @provost.

4. PGT Student Satisfaction surveys:

Pro-Dean PGT - Summary of PGT Student Satisfaction Surveys, regarding their PGT experience: The PGT Student Satisfaction Surveys were used to gather information on why a student would fill in a survey like this, and what, if any incentives could be used to increase feedback on surveys of this nature. The responses from the surveys have been analysed both informally and scientifically.

Incentives were offered to increase satisfaction survey feedback: Draw for a free lunch, £100 online voucher, a free joke, a social event with pizza, a 6-month extension on university library/computer account access after graduation.

The most highly selected option amongst PGTs was 6-months of post-graduation access to university library & email accounts.

Consequently, all PGT students that complete both Student Satisfaction Surveys will be entitled to a 6-month extension to electronic online library resources at this university.

This should be in place by next week.

The six months period runs after the student has finished studies (September-March, for example).

To encourage students to fill out the survey, PGT representatives should organise an event with pizza. The format for this should be simple: 'Meet-Eat-Complete'

PGT reps to organise this event for w/c 25th May (the same week as when the surveys are sent out). PGT representatives will be sent advertising materials for this.

An important point concerning funding:

Your school president is the first point of contact for funding for this event. Alternatively, the Educational Discretionary Fund (EDF) can be applied to through the Union.

5. Strikes:

Incoming Academic Convenor - There is the possibility for further industrial action to be announced, due to the ongoing UCU UUK pensions dispute.

Director of Education - UCU have called for 5 further days of strike action next week 16th-21st April. There is however a deal on the table to suspend strike action from UUK for one year, while an independent evaluation of the pension fund is carried out. UCU members are currently balloting this proposal. Result of this ballot is tomorrow afternoon (Friday 13th April) at 15:00. If accepted, strike action will cease. If not, more strikes possible, with as little as 2 weeks' notice.

Information correct at time of writing.

Further implications of the strike and possible strategies to minimise the disruption they may cause were discussed.

- The result of the ballot on Friday 13th May revealed that UCU members voted to suspend industrial action for 12 months while an independent evaluation of the pension fund is carried out.

6. PG Student Representation:

Incoming Academic Convenor – when it comes to PG student representation as a class rep, what has worked well? Have you been able to communicate effectively with the students you represent?

History – In order to contact my students, I first have to contact the School President and get them to send out emails on my behalf.

Social Anthropology – I also have to contact the School President to send out information, or I have to communicate via a Facebook group.

It could be beneficial to have a third meeting mid-way throughout the year. First meetings typically are large and have lots of bright new ideas, but when it comes to the end of the year, the majority of PGT student are preparing to leave the university.

Classics – It would be beneficial to have more participation with teaching staff, so that they know what it is that we are discussing.

Action Point: Incoming Academic Convenor to check if it is viable to add a third PGT Executive Forum to the calendar, taking place early in Semester 2 of the Academic Year.

Marking Guidelines:

History - The marking guidelines provided in the handbook are very general and it would be valuable to have a more specific list of what is expected.

History & Divinity – Sample essays in the course handbook would be very useful.

English – Some sample essays are provided, but they are around 8-10 years out of date.

Pro-Dean PGT – do you get to see the marking sheet for the essay, before you write the essay?

Yes (Social Anthropology), Word document only (Classics) and feedback on a paper copy only (English).

The committee agrees that clarity in this area and standardisation of how lecturers mark is important. Inconsistencies in this area can have large implications.

Pro-Dean PGT – This was raised by several students in the PGT satisfaction survey.

Action Point: Academic Convenor/Incoming Academic Convenor to enquire at a university level about what improvements it is feasible to make, regarding the standardisation of essay marking guidelines available to students.

Meeting adjourned.