

**Meeting:** Doctoral Council

**Date & Time:** Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> November 2020, 12:30 – 13:30

**Attending**

Fritz Ho (Chair)	SU Postgraduate Officer
Ashley Smith	Department of Education
Oliver Holt	Department of Electronic & Electrical Engineering
Javed Ahmed	Department of Social Policy Sciences
Niamh Leaman	Department of Chemistry
Alessandro Lucini Paioni	School of Management
Amine Moussa	School of Management
Annabel Burnley	Department of Psychology
Catherine Kamau	Department of Social Policy Sciences
Chloe Burke	Department of Psychology
Dan Bowen	Department of Mechanical Engineering
Daniel Warner	Department of Education
Eric Holaman	School of Management
Fadoua Govaerts	Department of Education
Rachel Deere	Department for Health
Izzy Fitton	Department of Computer Science
Jonathan Dempsey	School of Management
Jose Muniz Martinez	School of Management
Kai-Cheng Yan	Department of Chemistry
Matt Hewitt	Department of Computer Science
Michael Rogerson	School of Management
Nurullah Eryilmaz	Department of Education
Peter King	Department of Economics
Jemima Cooper	School for Health
Katharina Hug	School of Management
Maike Klein	Department of Social & policy Sciences
Pooja Anil Kumar Nair	Department of Architecture & Civil Engineering
Taghried Abdelmagid	Department of Architecture & Civil Engineering
Nurullah Eryilmaz	Department of Education
Rosa Kowalewski	Department of Mathematical Sciences
Thomas Williams	Department of Computer Science
Tim Stoneman (minutes)	SU

**Agenda**

**Paper**

## 1. SU Officer's Update

### (a) PG mental health

Fritz presented a paper yesterday on PGR and PGT mental health, and addressing it through preventative measures to CSSU (Council/Senate/SU) committee. The paper also recommended the evaluation of the mental health impact on postgraduates of the Coronavirus pandemic. CSSU have approved the paper. CSSU is made up of senior management in University and SU, and help shape University policy and strategy.

### (b) Furlough scheme for PGWTs needed

Attendance at IPT sessions is very low, and some departments are considering withdrawing them. Fritz has been in discussions with UCU about how to ensure that PGWTs could be in the furlough scheme if that happened. The SU and UCU are about to release a joint survey for PGWTs.

SU

### (c) Raised concerns about some University-funded students who are not covered by the Research Disruption Scheme.

### (d) Asked the University to review PGR workplace assessments

This issue was raised in the Doctoral Forum. In August we asked the University Doctoral Studies Committee, chaired by Jeremy Bradshaw, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Doctoral & International, to provide workplace assessments for all doctoral students. The reply was that because these are coordinated at departmental level, but the Doctoral College has emailed all departments to ask them to do this. We are currently looking into whether departments could allow doctoral students to borrow office equipment from offices if the departments cannot purchase equipment for students. The Doctoral College has emailed heads of department to ask this.

**Action:** There has been no update since September, so will raise this at the next UDSC.

Fritz

### (e) Asked the University to provide monthly conferments of research degrees

Without fixed end dates, doctoral students can often miss dates for University conferment. The delays that are caused can affect employment and visas.

### (f) Setting up a page to provide PG Officer's updates, Coronavirus information, general FAQs and anonymous forum

## 2. Funding extension (Covid funding support)

Note: This discussion took place before the UKRI statement on

doctoral extensions made on 11<sup>th</sup> November, and the likely need for doctoral students to 'adjust research' to complete their PhDs.

This includes the Research Interruption Scheme and the scheme for University-funded students.

Niamh made the observation that the current funding extension for university funded students isn't useful for lab-based students. It is essentially 3-month write-up extension, which doesn't help make up the lost lab time. Niamh noted that doctoral students couldn't continue lab work in the extended write up time, and it would become unaffordable to continue lab work without a stipend and bench fee.

### **3. Postgraduates Who Teach (PGWTs)**

#### **(a) Information and orientation**

Thomas relayed the comments of a doctoral student that at the beginning of the semester information and orientation for PGWTs was a little haphazard, and it was necessary to find out where teaching was taking place on the day. Thomas commented that understandably departments may not have been sure of developments at this stage. Fritz replied that similar communications issues arose sometimes last year.

#### **(b) IPT**

Tim noted that IPT (In-Person Teaching) is a commitment to campus-based 'face-to-face' teaching for UGs and PGTs, and this will have implications for doctoral students working as PGWTs.

#### **(c) Training**

Niamh suggested that more technical help would have been useful this year - running online tutorials has been reliant on trial and error on teams and zoom. There was training run by CLT which we thought would cover how to run online sessions, and there were lots of question along those lines, but it wasn't covered.

Additional training at this stage from CLT would probably not be useful for doctoral students already running tutorials, although it may be useful if there are people who haven't started teaching yet. Everyone I know will have run several tutorials at this point and decided what works for them, we really needed it before we started teaching this year so we could have a plan and an understanding of how to best use technology.

#### **(d) Survey**

Dan noted that the PGWT survey mentioned by Fritz would be welcome, but it would be preferable if this could be as soon as could be arranged. As we are well into the semester now, as

by the time completed, analysed and acted upon will be the end of the semester. It would be a welcome channel to raise concerns that could be raised in University committees. Fritz invited all Reps to help promote the survey to make it more effective.

#### **4. Working conditions (campus/ home)**

##### **(a) Workplace assessments**

Thomas asked if there is any information on how many doctoral students are facing health complications because of inadequate workstation assessments. He noted that working from home has had an impact has had regardless of whether or not their department has communicated effectively about workstation assessments. Thomas also commented on how difficult workstation assessments are to complete.

Tim noted that another Rep had commented that although workplace assessments have been done for most doctoral students, this was early on, and long-term effects such as isolation have a real bearing So the workplace situation may have changed since the assessment was first conducted.

##### **(b) Health and safety**

Thomas commented that with health and safety the responsibility of departments, it places undue burden on the Health and Safety Coordinator in each department. Thomas suggested that as this is an issue that affects everybody, in a way that it has not in normal circumstances, the University should take on more of the responsibility.

Concerns were also raised that the process can be circular: in one example, a doctoral student submitted a workplace assessment and the feedback directed them to their supervisor, although it was their supervisor who directed them to complete the form.

You can now fill in an Agresso form to claim for certain equipment, but sometimes the process is not as clear as it should be. Wellbeing and mental health is related to this, and makes the need for effective signposting and information on support services more important than ever.

#### **5. Communication between doctoral students and the SU**

Fritz asked how Reps would prefer the SU helped in the collection of feedback, or help with communication channels to reach doctoral students.

#### **7. Rep training**

Tim thanked Reps who had attended Doctoral Academic Reps

training, and that there had been very positive feedback about it. Presentations are being posted in the Teams channel, and Reps are still able to engage with it. The Teams channel be using that as an ongoing channel of communication, which hopefully Reps will find useful. A Reps Development Programme is also being developed by the SU, with a range of sessions on specific themes and issues. There will be more information on that scheme soon.

**9. Time and date of next meeting:**

Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2020, 12:30 – 1:30 pm