

## Minutes

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**Meeting:**           **Doctoral Council**

**Date & Time:**      Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2020, 12:30 – 13:30

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Fritz Ho (Chair)	SU Postgraduate Officer
Lorenzo Giunta	Department of Mechanical Engineering
Ashley Smith	Department of Education
Oliver Holt	Department of Electronic & Electrical Engineering
Stefano Cuomo (Doctoral Exec)	Department of Mechanical Engineering
Stefan Chindea (Faculty Rep)	Department of Electronic & Electrical Engineering
Jelena Lagger (Faculty Rep)	School of Management
Niamh Leaman	Department of Chemistry
Alessandro Lucini Paioni	School of Management
Amine Moussa	School of Management
Moanis Khedr	Department of Electronic & Electrical Engineering
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
Florian Zabel	Centre for Policy Research & Practice
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
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

Fran Amery, the Vice-President of the Bath Branch of UCU (Universities & Colleges Union) was invited to discuss PGWT Survey results, and was present only for item 2.

<u>Agenda</u>	<u>Paper</u>
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## 1. Faculty Open SSLC

Tim commented that Faculty Open SSLCs are also open to non-reps. They would be potentially larger and probably have a different dynamic and format than conventional 'closed' SSLCs.

Alessandro remarked that open SSLCs cannot and should not replace 'closed' SSLCs. He noted that the School of Management are still using closed SSLCs. Alessandro has collected feedback from doctoral students in the School of Management and has arranged a meeting with directors of studies to discuss it.

## 2. Phase 2 UKRI Covid Support Policy

### 2.1 Research adjustment

Tim noted that the phrase UKRI used was 'adjust your research' after discussion with supervisor. Although a term that sounds relatively innocuous, this obviously could be very far-reaching.

Chloe raised concern that it was not clear how or if second-year doctoral students are being considered for extensions. It was noted by Alessandro that while first year students got time to adjust, third years were offered extensions, leaving second years in the most difficult position.

Other Reps also voiced disappointment with the UKRI response.

Michael disagreed with UKRI's assumption that pivoting research just to do something that is achievable negates the idea that the project was worth investing in, and it was the original research which UKRI judged to be worthy of funding. He commented that given that it takes months to come up with a research proposal, it seems unreasonable to expect doctoral students to come up with a new one in the time they are doing a PhD. This would be in addition to all the other expectations and requirements they have to fulfil. Michael noted that he would be taking this issue up directly with the Director of UKRI, in his capacity as SWDTP Rep.

Soo-Hwa Kim commented that the University has not been transparent about plans, causing doctoral students stress and anxiety. Fritz responded that in the current situation, as it evolves plans cannot be guaranteed.

### 2.2 Mitigating circumstances and publishability

Lorenzo suggested that the issue should be addressed by looking more fundamentally at how the University assesses PhD theses rather than by straightforward mitigating circumstances. Jeremy Bradshaw has indicated that standards of PhD theses should remain the same despite the circumstances. Lorenzo suggested that if there are any problems where data collection was cut short or other issues, this could be highlighted.

Fritz responded by noted that the challenge that the thesis of "publishable quality" (Appendix 6, QA7) may make mitigation difficult, although Lorenzo's suggestion may go some way to addressing that issue.

### **2.3 Employability**

Michael commented that if the University cannot find a way of giving doctoral students who need more time a way of getting it, then it can have real implications for employability. This was agreed with by a number of students, including Annabel who agreed that the 'adjustments' are likely to devalue the overall project and potentially have compromising effects on the impact of the PhD and future career. Michael also remarked that doctoral students volunteer to be overworked and underpaid, and the notion that PhDs will take longer than necessary through choice misunderstands everything about doctoral students and the PhD process.

### **2.4 Financial support**

It was noted by Alessandro that money allocation to final years was also competitive, and what was provided was essentially a fee-free deadline extension.

Lorenzo commented that while the fee-free extension may have worked differently in other departments, in the Department of Mechanical Engineering you are expected to pay for a full year prior to this taking effect.

Alessandro added that in the School of Management 'final year' students are in write-up, so they are effectively paying for a write-up fee. Doctoral students were simply given up to 3 months without requiring any other payment, if this was requested.

## **3. Evaluation of doctoral working conditions**

Fritz noted that the Doctoral College is looking for ways to enable doctoral students to borrow furniture for home working, and has contacted departments about this.

Soo-Hwa Kim commented that in the Department of Mechanical Engineering, 8E windows are kept open all the time to provide ventilation. Although there is an understanding that this is done to make the space Covid-secure, it does mean that those spaces are very cold all of the time. Soo-Hwa asked if a suitable assessment of working conditions had been carried out there.

Jelena noted that while in the School of Management it had been communicated that it was possible to borrow equipment to work from home with University funding. However, for international students working from overseas the transport costs may make this financially unviable.

## **4. PGWT Survey results.**

### **4.1 GTA training and organisation**

Lorenzo commented that the experience of postgraduate teaching in Mechanical Engineering was very low coordination, especially in relation to fractional contracts. No procedures were in place for this, and no procedures in place for the requirements on GTAs having to self-isolate, making it difficult to understand what the department's requirements were. In the department, there were many departments doing longer hours but despite this was not aware of any on fractional contracts.

Niamh reported that she was not getting suitable training for preparation for teaching undergraduates, despite The Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences having a well-organised scheme. A Centre for Learning & Teaching session was run on teaching, but this was general and everyone wanted something different from it.

Alessandro agreed, noting that there was no department-specific training in the School of Management. He found the material generic, of little use in informing teaching.

#### **4.2 IPT and online teaching**

Alessandro noted that IPT started in one format but has changed. It is important to note that the situation is evolving.

Fran commented that she had heard reports that IPT had lower numbers, or even zero in some cases.

Lorenzo noted that once the travel corridor opened, people left in significant numbers.

Michael added that the lowering numbers have happened in online teaching as well. Since he also taught at UWE, observed that the same thing had happened there as well.

#### **5. Time and date of next meeting:**

Monday 18<sup>th</sup> January 2021, 12:30 – 1:30 pm