

**Meeting:** Doctoral Council

**Date & Time:** Monday 18<sup>th</sup> January 2021, 12:30 – 13:30

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
Jelena Lager (Faculty Rep)	School of Management
Niamh Leaman	Department of Chemistry
Alessandro Lucini Paioni	School of Management
Amine Moussa	School of Management
Chloe Burke	Department of Psychology
Dan Bowen	Department of Mechanical Engineering
Daniel Warner	Department of Education
Eric Holaman	School of Management
Jon Noble	Department of Chemical Engineering
Fadoua Govaerts	Department of Education
Izzy Fitton	Department of Computer Science
Jonathan Dempsey	School of Management
Jose Muniz Martinez	School of Management
Kai-Cheng Yan	Department of Chemistry
Peter King	Department of Economics
Jemima Cooper	School for Health
Katharina Hug	School of Management
Pooja Anil Kumar Nair	Department of Architecture & Civil Engineering
Taghried Abdelmagid	Department of Architecture & Civil Engineering
Rosa Kowalewski	Department of Mathematical Sciences
Thomas Williams	Department of Computer Science
Tim Stoneman (minutes)	SU

## Agenda

### 1. SU Officer's Update

The PG Officer outlined several current themes of relevance to doctoral students:

#### 1.1 Responsibilities of Postgraduate Who Teach (PGWT)

The SU works with UCU (Universities & Colleges Union) on PGWT issues. As teaching staff, PGWTs have the right to expect a work environment which meets health and safety requirements. There are multiple departments and professional services involved in provision for PGWTs, and this can lead to challenges in communication, including on

IPT teaching in the current situation. I am meeting this week with Jeremy Bradshaw, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for International & Doctoral, and Peter Lambert, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Learning and Teaching, to discuss how communication to PGWTs can be improved.

## **1.2 Hardship fund requirement and availability**

Doctoral students are experiencing financial difficulties like never before, but the requirements of the University's hardship fund are not clear. Fritz explained that he is asking Student Services if any additional funding is available for purchase of equipment to work from home.

## **1.3 SU Doctoral Page (FAQ)**

The SU's Postgrad page is being tailored to include separate PGT and doctoral pages. Doctoral student input on FAQs and key issues affecting the doctoral community were welcomed.

## **1.4 Doctoral Employability Strategy**

The PG Officer explained that he is on the working group for the University's Doctoral Employability Strategy. University senior management has asked for a report by the end of March on what this strategy should be, and what needs to be improved.

## **1.5 UKRI Phase 2 Extension Funding**

It was noted by the PG Officer that UKRI-funded doctoral students should have received an email explaining the extension process, with the applications opening today. He added that he would be interested to hear doctoral students' views on the fairness of the extension and if anything needed clarification.

## **1.6 COVID Statement**

The PG Officer outlined that the University is permitting an explanatory note of how Coronavirus is affecting your studies in the first draft of the doctoral thesis. No update on this has been received as of yet, but he noted that he will ask Jeremy Bradshaw in their meeting later today. As it stands, the statement would be integral to thesis.

**Action:** PG Officer to ask Jeremy Bradshaw for update on Covid statement.

### **Inclusion of Covid statement in published thesis or only draft to examiners**

A School of Management rep commented that he felt it would be more appropriate to separate the form from the actual document. The thesis itself is going to be published at some point, and it would then be a permanent public section, but this should only be an internal document.

A Department of Chemical Engineering rep commented that the examiners are awarding the research degree, so the guidance should go to them. He suggested something that is uploaded on Samis at the same time as the Thesis but that doesn't get included in the permanently published thesis. They added that the University should confirm that consideration will be made of circumstances raised.

### **'Publishable quality' of PhD**

A Department of Chemical Engineering rep noted that it would be helpful if any statement reflects that although the quantity of research may be reduced as a consequence of Covid, the quality and novelty meets the standard required to award a PhD.

A School of Management rep remarked that the standard of the PhD thesis is very indefinite, and for that reason the viva exists to confirm that appropriate quality is there.

### **Authorship of Covid statement**

A School of Management rep suggested that it important that doctoral students write this themselves because they are most acquainted with situation. They noted that at other universities this goes to the draft going to the examiners, but not necessarily having to go for publication.

## **2. Supervision (SU Top 10; What do you expect from your supervisors)**

The PG Officer invited comments on what constituted good supervision.

### **Unconscious bias**

The Department of Computer Science rep noted that it would be useful to provide unconscious bias training for supervisors.

### **IT skills**

A rep from the School of Management pointed out that they were aware of a supervisor who isn't 'tech-savvy' is unwilling to use Teams, or use software that enables different people to edit document concurrently.

A Department of Education rep commented that in the current conditions, using and learning the skills for remote working is key to supervision.

The Faculty Rep for the Humanities & Social Sciences agreed that basic software knowledge is a completely reasonable expectation, but there are limits as to what exact expectations students can have.

### **Time management**

The Faculty Rep for the Humanities & Social Sciences noted that a good supervisor should not forget the responsibility that comes with taking students on and should be able to allocate the time necessary for it. There are pressures on supervisors to take students on, for example for career progression. However, they should make sure to have the capacity for it, otherwise mentees will lose out.

### **Existing training**

The Faculty Rep for the Humanities & Social Sciences recalled that her supervisor mentioned doing an online course on how to be a good supervisor. Her understanding was that he did it on his own initiative but maybe this could be expanded to have all supervisors do a short online course.

The PG Coordinator noted that supervisory training is provided by the University to new supervisors, and mandatory training is now planned for all supervisors, but has not yet been approved by Senate.

### **Supervisory toolkit**

The Department of Computer Science rep suggested that the Doctoral College could create a document of useful skills for how to help supervisors.

### **Principles and best practice**

The Faculty Rep for the Humanities & Social Sciences raised the point that supervisory styles vary and this is necessary and beneficial, so there is not a 'one-size fits all' template but perhaps principles such as adaptability can be identified and best practice shared. This was agreed by the Department of Computer Science rep.

A rep for the School of Management agreed that supervisors should share best practices among themselves. Or how they dealt with specific issues. They commented that this can be tricky, because some supervisors could see this as a direct critique to their 'way of doing things,' but saw this as the only way to unlock some very specific knowledge that only supervisors actually have. In this way, supervisors could build their own 'toolkit' of instruments they can try to use with each specific student.

### **Creating the conditions for happy and effective researchers**

A School of Management rep noted that if the doctoral student is happier and the conditions for that can be encouraged, they more likely to be an effective researcher.

### **Covid**

**Submitted in follow-up email:** The rep for Mechanical Engineering raised that during the pandemic supervisors have been delegated additional roles that are outside of their job scope, including ensuring their student has proper at-home working conditions, providing their support for funding extensions, without any sort of clear guidance or standardisation of what is acceptable. They were concerned that this can lead to subjective outcomes impacting doctoral students. They suggested that this standardisation could be done at a university- or department-level and would ultimately alleviate supervisors of out-of-scope tasks/decisions and would be fairer for doctoral students.

### **3. Video viva examinations**

The Department of Computer Science rep highlighted that having a space available would be important for those doctoral students who would not feel comfortable having a viva at home.

The Department of Chemistry rep commented that they had done her transfer viva on teams. They found that it works well, with the only issue they had experienced being their wifi being unreliable. If the University offered rooms in the Virgil Building or similar study spaces, that would address the potential problem.

### **4. Effectiveness of Check-in surveys**

The PG Officer explained that the University has asked all students in both week 4 and 8 to complete a very short survey on their academic and wider experience, intended to capture how the current fast-changing situation is affecting students. There has been discussion within the University about whether doctoral students should be included in the Semester 2 survey. He invited comments.

### **Relevance of questions**

The Department of Education rep noted that in her department there was very low participation in this survey. They reported that the survey questions seemed did not seem relevant to the doctoral experience.

### **Lack of action following issues raised**

The Department of Education rep commented there the short time between surveys gave little time for changes to be implemented. Doctoral students reported seeing participation

seemed like a 'waste of time' as straightforward changes were not developed from their response.

The Department of Chemical Engineering rep agreed, reporting that students in his department were not receiving communication about what was being done about the issues raised in the survey. People were starting to disengage with the process. It was questioned what the outcome hoping to be achieved with the survey was, and whether it was being achieved. The perception is that they are feeding comments in, but not seeing action.

**Submitted in follow-up email:** A rep for Mechanical Engineering expressed disappointment with the Check-in Survey, noting that the University does not openly post the results nor do they provide resolutions that directly result from the survey. They commented that with poor communication from the University since the beginning of Coronavirus.

**Note (after meeting):** The PG Coordinator added that departments are supposed to produce action plans based on the result of the Check-in Survey. That has worked well in the past for PRES, although where questions are more detailed, doctoral-specific and response is much higher.

The PG Officer noted that the SU and the Doctoral College are drafting a paper to go to UDSC next week (28 January) on the key issues raised in the Check-in Survey. We will be asking why a proper analysis of the survey response with appropriate action on issues has not yet been carried out by the University.

## 5. Any other business

### 5.1 Training Support Fees (Bench fees)

The Department of Education rep raised there is not clear guidance for international students what happens with bench fees. They commented that more transparency of bench fees was needed to see how much have left, and of course more control of that budget. They also asked if bench fees could be used to buy equipment doctoral students need to work from home.

**Action:** PG to raise with Doctoral College.

**Note (after meeting):** The PG Coordinator noted that the University charges bench fees (Training Support Fee) to funded and unfunded PGRs in some departments, mostly in the Faculties of Science and Engineering & Design, for research expenses, with the budget controlled by the supervisor. In some cases they allow use for conferences, and other expenses but this is at the supervisor's discretion. For funded students, the funder may make some stipulations about bench fees. <https://www.bath.ac.uk/corporate-information/training-support-fees/>

### 5.2 Funding for equipment

It was raised by the Department of Education rep that in cases where doctoral students are not able to work from home, they are now allowed to work on campus with permission from their head of department. However, there will be some who need to shield due to health conditions. They asked if there was additional funding available

The PG Officer noted that the University has now stated that if there are non-University funds that a department has control over, such as bench fees or research grant, they can

be used to pay for equipment for doctoral students to work from home. The requirements of a funder will have to be considered, as will potential future research project costs. It is still at the supervisor's discretion, but directors of studies are now being urged by Jeremy Bradshaw to make borrowing or buying the equipment doctoral students need a priority and make an audit of unused equipment that can be borrowed.

### **5.3 Fee-free extension**

**Submitted in follow-up email:** A Department of Mechanical Engineering rep raised that reps in the department have been in contact with the Doctoral College regarding the Fee-free extension after having heard that other faculties have accessed it before the end of registration. They asked specific details how to access the extension early, and were told that:

- Officially the fee-free extension is only applied at the end of the enrolment date and is for a period of 3 months.
- On a case-by-case basis this can be changed so you can access the fee-free extension earlier; an application via email needs to be made to the Doctoral College.
- If doctoral students have already paid for their year because they were not properly informed by the university about this opportunity, they will not be refunded but must wait until the end of their enrolment period to make use of the extension
- Application can also be made to the Research Interruption Scheme (which is a separate scheme from the fee-free extension).

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

Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2021, 12:30 – 1:30 pm