

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

**Date & Time:**    Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2021, 12:30 – 13:30

Fritz Ho (Chair)	SU Postgraduate Officer (PGO)
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
Lukas Ohnoutek	Department of Physics
Soo-Hwa Kim	Department of Mechanical Engineering
Stephanie Hall	Department of Mechanical Engineering
Masha Remškar (Faculty Rep)	Department of Psychology
Michael Rogerson	School of Management
Catherine Kamau	Department of Social & Policy Sciences
Rita Prior Filipe Filipe (Doctoral Exec)	Department of Mechanical Engineering
Tim Stoneman (minutes)	Postgraduate Coordinator, SU (PGC)

## **Agenda**

### **1. Matters arising**

**1.1 Covid statement update:** a paper was brought to UDSC last week on the form this should take. The decision was made prior to the meeting for a generic statement, but the University are also advising examiners to ask the PGR in the viva about the impact of Covid on their research.

**1.2 Transparency of bench fees account:** this issue was raised with the DC, and there was discussion about taking this to University Finance to explore the possibility of changing doctoral students' permissions. This is likely to need the agreement of individual supervisors. PGO will follow up.

**Action:** PGO to follow up on bench fees.

## 2. PG Officer's update

### 2.1 Working from home support

Jeremy Bradshaw, Pro-Vice-Chancellor International and Doctoral, has contacted all doctoral directors of studies, advising them to audit unused equipment and consider how best to help equipment reach remote working PGRs where possible. Equipment loans and purchasing equipment should be easier but not guaranteed. The Doctoral College has now contacted PGRs to notify them.

### 2.2 Guidelines for video viva

A rep from the School of Management asked if video vivas were only intended as a measure in response to Coronavirus, or whether it was seen as an option in the long term. The PGO noted that the video viva guidance in the appendix of the University code of practice (QA7) actually pre-dates Coronavirus and makes no mention of it.

[https://www.bath.ac.uk/publications/ga7-research-degrees/attachments/QA7\\_Appendix\\_3\\_-\\_](https://www.bath.ac.uk/publications/ga7-research-degrees/attachments/QA7_Appendix_3_-_Use_of_Video_Conferencing_in_Viva_Voce_Examinations.pdf)

[Use of Video Conferencing in Viva Voce Examinations.pdf](https://www.bath.ac.uk/publications/ga7-research-degrees/attachments/QA7_Appendix_3_-_Use_of_Video_Conferencing_in_Viva_Voce_Examinations.pdf) However, it requires certain criteria to be satisfied, and University senior management were keen to make its use the norm during Coronavirus. As it stands, the QA7 requirements will stand in the future, but there is hope to smooth the process for request and approval to conduct vivas by video.

### 2.3 Training for supervisors

The PGO reported that the University will be inviting all supervisors to a training programme for supervisor-supervisee confidential discussions. The PGO considered this an important step towards hopefully introducing mandatory supervisor training, an SU Top Ten issue this year.

### 2.4 Semester 2 Check-in Survey

The University has made a decision that PGRs will continue to be included in the Check-in Surveys, although prof docs may not be sent the survey due to their differing academic experience. However, it has been acknowledged that more work needs to be done on presenting and communicating the survey. For example, sample answers had previously been very undergraduate or taught-orientated.

### 2.5 URSA funding extension

It was noted in UDSC that it is hopeful that work underway to achieve this. A rep from the Department of Mechanical Engineering asked what the timescales were likely to be, and which service in the University had responsibility for funding extensions. The PGO explained that this is an issue which the SU will have to continue to press the University on. There has been the indication of progress, but the SU will be staying in contact to

ensure firm timescales are communicated. The PGO added that Simon Gane (Head of Doctoral Recruitment and Programmes) in the Doctoral College is responsible for funding extensions.

**Action:** PGO to clarify funding extension progress and timescales with Simon Gane

### 3. Solutions to PGWT issues

#### a. Background

The PGO explained that the background to SU campaigning on PGWT. It is an issue that has remained a priority for several years now, with the SU listening to student experiences and lobbying the University consistently. Significant progress has been made, but it is clear that more needs to be done. PGWT was an SU Top Ten issue in 2017-18, and a University working group was formed of stakeholders on the issue, including the Doctoral College, The SU, UCU, CLT, and Academic Registry. The Doctoral College created a wiki resource of best practice for staff involved in PGWT. This was passed over to CLT to take forward but is not currently in use. The PGC noted that in looking at PGWT provision across the sector, found Exeter particularly impressive with an explicit commitment to PGWTs and an explicit recognition of their value. Exeter expressed that it wanted the world-class doctoral environment to include the recognition, support and development of PGGWTs.

#### b. Multiple providers and stakeholders

The PGO noted that many PGWT issues are at a local level due to inconsistencies between departments and difficulty in disseminating best practice. The PGC added that the multiple providers involved in PGWT, from different academic departments, CLT, HR and other professional services, made a consistent approach more difficult. Although improvements have been made, the relatively casual, informal nature of PGWT recruitment meant that a lot of important elements of employment, including training, support, and other elements had not been prioritised in the way they might for other University employment.

#### c. Proposed QA9 amendment

The PGO noted that if the University Code of Practice for PGWTs (QA9) could be revised to set out how PGWT should be structured and implemented, then a coordinated approach would be easier. He noted that changes to QA9 would The improved outcomes are likely to benefit doctoral students, the PGO commented. <https://www.bath.ac.uk/publications/qa9-professional-development-and-recognition-for-staff-and-students-who-teach-and-support-learning/attachments/qa9.pdf> The PGO noted that codes of practice has been updated in this way in other universities to benefit PGRs. The PGO showed a table of PGWT codes of practice at different universities, including the areas covered: teaching induction, monitoring quality in teaching, appropriate training and development, recruitment, coordinating teaching activities, safeguarding student's capacity, representation and feedback on the role, and contacts. Notably, Bath doesn't stipulate where to find PGWT contacts are or how feedback should be provided.

The rep for the Department of Mechanical Engineering expressed hope that the Doctoral Council would press for improvements in all of the areas included in the table.

#### d. Lack of feedback system

The PGC suggested that the University clarifies where to direct feedback on PGWT and

QA9 be amended to include this.

It was commented by a rep from the Department of Mechanical Engineering that implementing a feedback system would be of great help to students who teach. They considered that it was an important factor in formalising the employment, otherwise the whole system remains highly uncertain and very difficult to guarantee wellbeing and standards for students. They noted that of the universities shown in the table, the University of Bath seems to offer less support than most.

The PGO commented that in the GW4 other universities seemed to offer more to PGWTs, with Exeter in particular coordinating provision and communicating more effectively to all those involved, PGRs included.

#### **e. Point of contact for departmental PGWT schemes**

The PGO suggested that the University provide an accessible directory of all key contacts or departmental PGWT coordinator, and this be included in QA9.

The PGC noted that the SU, Doctoral College and the PGWT Working Group in 2018-19 recommended that departments designate a single point of contact for their PGWT schemes. The term 'GTA Coordinator' was used, but this was not intended as a formal post, just identifying responsibility which could then be communicated to PGRs. In some departments the person with responsibility for PGWT is an academic, more usually it is a member of support staff. The PGC added that in most departments, identifying a contact has not been straightforward for PGWTs, and this can present issues.

The Department of Education rep noted that in their department it was the Director of Teaching who was the first point of contact for PGWT issues.

#### **f. Coronavirus impact on recruitment and training**

A rep from the Department of Education observed that the limited timescale due to Coronavirus and the freezing of department funding had a significant impact on PGWT recruitment and training. Applicants for PGWT work were told that the department only had two weeks to plan work schedules and whether budgets could meet this cost. It was not until all enrolments, especially year 1, had been confirmed that this could go ahead. For the communication between heads of department, unit convenors and individual PGWTs, two weeks was not enough. They reported that conflicting information was sometimes given, PGRs were told there would be two opportunities to apply for PGWT positions, one in semester 1 and one in semester 2. They relayed that PGRs were later told that there was only one recruitment process for both semesters. They suggested that giving departments more time would help address some of the issues experienced.

The PGO noted that the Resilient Curriculum Committee was looking at all teaching and the University's delivery of it in response to Coronavirus. The SU Education Officer sits on this, and should be able to raise this issue.

**Action:** PGO to relay to SU Education Officer to raise PGWT departmental planning times at Resilient Curriculum Committee.

#### **g. PGWT overall responsibility within University**

The PGO noted that PGWT organisation was complicated further by PGWT responsibility within the University straddling both doctoral and learning and teaching.

**Note (after meeting):** A rep from the Department of Electronic and Electrical Engineering commented that they felt it was inappropriate for PGWT to be considered a doctoral issue. They considered it to be a wholly learning and teaching and general employment issue. They commented that PGWTs experience the disadvantages of both student and employee statuses while experiencing few of the benefits of either. They cited the disappointing pay, lack of employment protection or pension, and suggested that it is more difficult to ensure PGR issues are resolved than it is for undergraduates.

**Note (after meeting):** A rep for the School of Management agreed that PGWT is not research-related, but suggested that increased recognition such as the SU's PG teaching award may prompt the University to reflect on how valuable PGRs' work is also outside research itself. They hoped that this consideration would involve asking the right questions: is this a matter for doctoral oversight or learning and teaching? What is the role of PGRs? They acknowledged that PGWT is an unusual hybrid topic. While teaching might not strictly relate to research, in the School of Management at least, if PGRs are looking for a job in academia, teaching experience is required.

It was suggested that the topic of the indeterminate doctoral/learning and teaching status of PGWT within the University be included as a topic in the next Doctoral Council.

**Note (after meeting):** It was noted by a Rep for the Department of Chemical Engineering that the Doctoral College had some role in helping improve the quality of PGWT support and conditions, and in different ways the Doctoral College brings in improvements in the doctoral experience. However, they commented that the Doctoral College was part of the University, rather than independent of it, and that the organisations who are able to independently lobby the University are the SU and in the case of PGWTs, UCU, the union that is free to join for PGRs in teaching work. The rep recommended directing concerns through those channels to help resolve issues where lobbying the University was necessary.

#### **h. PGWT survey**

A rep from the Department of Education asked for results of the PGWT Survey that the SU ran jointly with UCU. The survey report was shared with reps by the PGO.

#### **i. Financial need of PGWTs**

A Department of Mechanical Engineering rep made the point that PGWTs are increasingly relying on teaching money to support themselves, which is not an issue for most while teaching opportunities are relatively easy to obtain. He commented that it demonstrates an underlying problem in that the system is not designed to accommodate increasing numbers of PGRs seeking to teach. It is harder to get teaching opportunities, harder to get longer hours, and harder to plan ahead due to cancellations or condensing through online teaching. The rep suggested that these issues show the need for standardisation in PGWT. If PGRs are going to be financially reliant on teaching, it must be done in a fair way, and that when requirements are communicated to PGRs they are able to rely on those hours.

A rep from the Department of Chemical Engineering agreed with this point of financial

reliance, and added that a part of the issue is that even if departmental standards fall, there are people who will step in because they need the money.

#### **j. Recognition through AFHEA**

The rep for Mechanical Engineering raised that there was no structured scheme of development for PGWTs carrying out teaching, in the way that was available for some other professional areas.

This was agreed by the rep from the Department of Economics, but they noted that PGWTs can apply for Associate Fellowship of the HEA (AFHEA), as probationary lecturers can, if they have sufficient teaching experience: <https://teachinghub.bath.ac.uk/professional-development-opportunities-in-learning-teaching-and-research/> The PGC noted that the Bath Scheme, that the University used to enable academic staff and PGWTs to work towards AFHEA, had very limited places for AFHEA, at least in 2019-20. The University was committed to ensuring that all academic staff had AFHEA, and as the qualification involved close monitoring of teaching experience this meant there were not enough mentors to observe PGWTs as well. The PGC hoped that as the majority of academic staff gained the qualification, there would be more AFHEA mentoring time for PGWTs to achieve this as recognition and professional development.

It was noted by the rep for the Department of Economics that to qualify for AFHEA, a certain number of teaching hours must be completed, so for PGWTs who have completed that worth applying now. In the Department of Economics it has been recommended that worth applying for. The rep agreed that conceiving of PGWTs as teaching staff and not just as students would be welcome in the context of teaching work. They commented that increased emphasis on signposting and improved teaching development provision for teaching would be welcome.

#### **k. Fractional contracts**

The PGC noted that in the previous Doctoral Council we have heard that not all departments have communicated the availability of these contracts, although HR has now introduced them for PGWTs where conditions are met.

A rep from Mechanical Engineering commented that fractional contracts were apparently being rolled out on an ad hoc basis, and enquired as to who was responsible for their implementation within departments. The PGC replied that the lack of a single point of contact for PGWT in departments meant that there was unlikely to be a single post across departments responsible for contracts.

The PGC added that fractional contracts will never apply to all PGWTs, as it relates to the number of hours offered in advance, and personal preference as well to some extent. In some cases individual PGWTs will prefer the flexibility offered by the casual arrangement.

### **4. Doctoral employability**

The PGO reported that the University's Doctoral Employability Workstream, of which he is a member, is looking at several distinct strands of PGR employability:

#### **4.1 Employer engagement**

The PGO reported that the University is looking to foster relationships with employers

who potentially might look to recruit doctoral graduates in the future, and convey the benefits of recruiting Bath PGRs.

#### **4.2 Skills training / career guidance provision and development opportunities**

The PGO noted that the University is looking to increase the number of non-academic an non-research skills, to help increase the employability of PGRs in consulting and the wider jobs market.

#### **4.3 Work experience / placement opportunities**

The PGO continued that the University is considering the suitability of different models of continuing professional development (CPD) for PGRs, and in some cases even placements for PhD students. Workplace experience is already integral to professional doctorates.

### **5. Research involving human participants**

The PGO noted that they have recently received emails from PGRs reporting that in their departments, research with human participants had been halted. The PGO invited comments from PGRs where further extension and funding was needed because research has been suspended, but also where departments have offered support or alternative approaches which may have been constructive.

#### **a. Research in schools**

The Department of Education rep raised that some universities are suspending any research done at school due to the immense pressure on headteachers and teachers. They expressed that while they are glad the University of Bath has not taken that approach, as researchers it is important to remain ethical.

### **6. Open issues**

None discussed.

### **7. Doctoral Exec event**

Stefano Cuomo, the Doctoral Exec Open Position holder, introduced themselves, and explained that the Exec plan a doctoral event for community-building. The event would be virtual, and primarily social at a time when the need for community is stronger than ever. Longer-term, it is hoped that this could become an in-person event on campus. Stefano invited reps to contact him with any comments about the event's structure and timing.

### **8. Any other business**

**8.1** The PC asked that if any reps do not get the Outlook invites for Doctoral Council meetings, please could they notify him at [t.stoneman@bath.ac.uk](mailto:t.stoneman@bath.ac.uk) or on Teams and they will be added.

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

Wednesday 3rd March 2021, 12:30 – 1:30 pm