

Meeting: Doctoral Council

Date & Time: Wednesday 21st April 2021, 12:30 – 13:30

Fritz Ho (Chair)	SU Postgraduate Officer (PGO)
Jelena Lager (Faculty Rep)	School of Management
Michael Rogerson	School of Management
Nurullah Eryilmaz	Department of Education
Alessandro Lucini Paioni	School of Management
Amine Moussa	School of Management
Chloe Burke	Department of Psychology
Anabel Burnley	Department of Psychology
Jonathan Dempsey	School of Management
Dan Bowen	Department of Mechanical Engineering
Daniel Warner	Department of Education
Jon Noble	Department of Chemical Engineering
Fadoua Govaerts	Department of Education
Jose Muniz Martinez	School of Management
Lukas Ohnoutek	Department of Physics
Stephanie Hall	Department of Mechanical Engineering
Masha Remškar (Faculty Rep)	Department of Psychology
Chloe Whittaker	Academic Representation Manager
Callie Edwards	Academic Representation Coordinator
Tim Stoneman (minutes)	Postgraduate Coordinator, SU (PGC)

Agenda

1. PG Officer's update

1.1 Confident conversations training for supervisors

Fritz explained that a new virtual workshop is being run in semesters 1 and 2, intended to help staff in certain roles, and especially supervisors, to handle exchanges on sometimes challenging topics. He shared the link

<https://www.bath.ac.uk/campaigns/confident-conversations/> Fritz suggested that it would be useful to run a doctoral forum on the subject of supervision.

1.2 New Doctoral News email

Fritz explained that the Doctoral Digest in its current form will no longer be produced by the Doctoral College, but doctoral news is now included in university communications. Last week's edition was the first to be produced in this way. Fritz commented that content should not be significantly affected.

Tim noted that the Doctoral Communications Manager position in the Doctoral College has been removed, and now works in University central communications team. The aim is for continuity but doctoral news may be shorter and it is likely that less of working time can now be devoted to doctoral content.

A Rep from the School of Management expressed concern that lack of resources to be allocated to the doctoral community had prompted the change. They commented that the doctoral community had experienced difficulty in recent times and the Doctoral Digest offered one means of cohesion.

1.3 Online resource supporting doctoral supervisors

Fritz shared the link for the online resource, <https://teachinghub.bath.ac.uk/supporting-doctoral-supervisors> and note that PGRs may have received notification from the Doctoral College. He noted that this new portal is intended to provide a toolbox for skills and knowledge for all aspects of supervision, including recruitment and selection, settling in an getting started, monitoring and progression, supporting the student, skills and career development, preparing and writing the thesis, the viva, challenges, and the supervisor's own professional development. Fritz acknowledged that the resource would not solve all supervisory issues, but suggested that it was an important first step. He noted that at the moment accessing the skills tutorials was not mandatory, but it is hoped that it will be seen as a set of competencies and knowledge essential to supervision. He invited comments on the resource.

1.4 PRES/PDES

Fritz reported that the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) and Professional Doctorate Experience Survey (PDES) were currently live and were open until midnight on 30th April. He noted that response rates were 14.89% for PRES and 13.50% for PDES, both disappointingly low. Fritz emphasised the value of the surveys as representative tools, and also for departments themselves to follow up on issues. He posted a slide with QR codes to the two surveys. Tim commented that the risk is that with low response rates, feedback in the surveys could be overlooked or downplayed. Fritz encouraged reps to complete and to promote them in departments, noting that completion meant the chance to win a £250 cash prize.

1.5 Faculty/School SSLC

Fritz noted that now that faculty and School SSLCs have resumed, it is important that reps attend SSLCs and raise student issues to the faculty or School. Apart from the value of making them aware of issue so they can be resolved, SSLC minutes are also included in FDSC meetings, and that permanent record also makes the University more responsive to issues. Fritz observed that recent doctoral issues raised in SSLCs include PGWTs, funding extensions, and equipment for homes and the lab, and would be interested to hear about more. He added that if you can't make an SSLC, issues can still be raised in advance to the committee secretary. Fritz noted that it is important to ensure that at least one rep per department can attend if possible, so worth liaising with other reps in the department.

Secretary's note: SSLC dates for each faculty and school are available at

<https://www.thesubath.com/academicreps/rep/sslc/>. Because Faculty SSLCs started so late this year, there may be benefits to reps in reviewing the Doctoral Academic Rep Training 101 PowerPoint at <https://www.thesubath.com/academicreps/rep/training/>. There are also resources on the page for reps operating as SSLC chairs.

1.6 Purchasing equipment from home

Fritz provided an update on how PGRs can buy suitable equipment for working from home. He noted that in the Doctoral Forum we had in March, questions were raised about purchasing equipment. The University encourages staff and students to use its central purchasing system, and Fritz shared the link to the University guidance for staff on buying equipment for home working <https://www.bath.ac.uk/corporate-information/buying-for-remote-working.bho/> Fritz suggested that reps can direct PGRs there if there are any enquiries on how to buy equipment for home, but also worth contacting the director of studies who may have more information.

Need to consider PGRs in procurement communications

A rep from the Department of Physics noted that the webpage referred to staff and not to doctoral students. They asked if the process also applied to PGRs, and if there was also a central or departmental budget for equipment in the same way as for staff, or whether bench fees would have to be used and then need the supervisor to check if the funder allows it. Fritz responded that the current guidelines, based on Jeremy Bradshaw's announcement, are that if supervisors agree for bench fees to be used for equipment purchase then it can, providing the funder permits. The announcement also stressed to supervisors that equipment for home working was an appropriate use and should be seriously considered.

Fritz added that he has requested that the Doctoral College update its webpage on purchasing equipment. The current link is intended for staff, but PGRs are using the same channel for purchasing equipment. The rep from the Department of Physics reported that they have asked the faculty to provide a table of the most common funders and whether or not they would allow equipment purchase from bench fees.

Need for suitable communication in website

A rep for the Department of Chemical Engineering noted that although the link was provided by the University as to be followed if ordering equipment for home working, there was nothing in its contents to indicate it was for that purpose. It was stressed that purchases had to be 'business-critical'. They commented that although may be suited to furniture purchases, if a PGR wished to order screens or assistive technology then not helpful. The rep continued, observing that apart from obvious items such as tables, chairs and PCs, there was nothing that helped explain what might be helpful in home working. They noted that although the content is something that might be very helpful to PGRs, it is currently written in terms of procurement policy and could be made more straightforward to be more widely used by a doctoral audience. The example they gave was that if 'IT equipment' was selected, the system just takes the user to generic equipment, rather than explaining what could be business-critical and different options for it. They suggested that this could save both DDAT and PGRs time by preventing request tickets that would be declined from being submitted. Fritz responded, agreeing to discuss with the Doctoral College.

Action: Fritz to suggest better communication for PGR purchasing of home working.

Limited brands available

The rep for the Department of Psychology commented that the procurement system is quite rigid about which brands can be purchased. They noted that they used an Apple computer themselves and so their preference was additional Apple equipment. When Apple equipment was claimed for it was met with some resistance. They acknowledged that the procurement system was likely to favour lower-end brands but suggested that some flexibility in guidance over certain items and allowing partial reimbursement for more expensive items. They noted that current constraints limit the extent that people can make use of the system.

Purchases outside procurement scheme

The rep for the Department of Physics observed that if doctoral students purchase equipment first outside the procurement scheme and try to claim back afterwards, they are likely to encounter difficulty. They noted that they are currently in communication with the Finance Office on this topic.

PGRs off-campus purchasing equipment

A rep for the School of Management commented that the University should consider the doctoral students who are not currently located in Bath. Due to the pandemic many PGRs are now in other parts of the UK or overseas, and they may also need IT equipment. They suggested that it would be helpful if they were also able to purchase equipment, and processes and guidance took this into account.

Fritz thanked reps for their comments and agreed to take these forward to the Doctoral College.

2. Academic Representation Review

Fritz shared the presentation and introduced SU staff Chloe Whittaker, the Academic Representation Manager, and Callie Edwards, the Academic Representation Coordinator.

Chloe briefly outlined the academic representation review, explaining that it was university-wide and intended to improve academic reps' experience and ensuring the system is as effective as possible. Fritz also posted the link to the SU page on the Rep Review, at <https://www.thesubath.com/academicreps/rep/review/>.

Callie noted that Phase 1 'Discover' of the review had been completed. This involved survey and interviews of staff, students and academic reps, and reviewing existing data from previous surveys that gave insights into the academic representation system. Best practice at other SUs was also looked at. She also explained that from these different sources, four 'pre-reading' papers have been produced:

- Recruitment proposals
- Training proposals
- Meeting proposals
- Recognition proposals

Each paper has a summary of all the feedback that has been received on that topic, what is currently provided and proposals for changes. Callie noted that while the proposals were fairly taught-focused, there are doctoral-specific changes that came out of a review and doctoral consultation in 2019. These were put on hold, and will be implemented alongside the wider review. Callie added that there is an engagement event tomorrow (22nd April, 12:00-1:30 pm) on the review for staff and students, and welcomed the attendance and input of doctoral reps.

Fritz posted the joining form for the engagement activity.

Chloe continued, explaining that there will be two doctoral break-out rooms in the event, with participants feeding into the review from the doctoral perspective. She added that any reps who would like to take part should post their names in chat and they would be sent background material in advance. Chloe also noted that there was a feedback button for the proposals on recruitment, training, meetings and recognition, and that reps can offer comments and suggestions which can then also be included. Comments can also be emailed to Chloe or Fritz.

3. Any other business

4.1 Publishable paper or thesis

A rep from the School of Management noted that the first cohort of PGRs are about to submit since changes to QA7 which permitted either a thesis in conventional format or the 'alternative thesis format' – a portfolio of articles of publishable quality. They noted that due to variation between supervisors on what constituted publishable quality, some doctoral students were anxious about whether their submission would be permissible. PGRs have reported that the requirements are quite general and this has led to variation in practice and a lack of clarity in how to meet requirements.

A different rep from the School of Management agreed, and noted that the term 'publishable quality' was subjective and so problematic. It can be interpreted in a number of ways, but when a PGR starts their PhD it is not clear what will be possible in the research. The rep continued that while the 'publishable' principle is clear in itself, it remains relative to the target journal the PGR is potentially aiming to publish in. They asked if it was possible to collect different case studies of how the standard of publishable quality has been applied in practice to different journals.

A rep from the Department of Chemical Engineering commented that their understanding of thesis by portfolio was that it was possible to have a single paper as part of a wider thesis, with explanation of how it fits into the thesis and what the contribution of the PGR was to the paper. They suggested that the School of Management may have a defined 3 paper route, but the Faculty of Engineering is more flexible in how the publishable quality thesis format is applied, ranging from one paper to fully composed of publishable papers, connected by an explanatory narrative.

A rep from the Department of Education noted that in their department did a workshop on it for fellow PGRs and let one of the doctoral students who is going down this route talk to others about it. The second rep from the School of Management commented that they will be starting a PhD-led discussion on the topic.

The rep from the Department of Chemical Engineering commented that they felt the thesis is 'publishable' by definition, so if it's good enough for a thesis, working the same materials

into a paper format should be acceptable. They note that they would expect a strong steer from primary and secondary supervisors on the approach on this but appreciate that they are also new to the process.

Secretary's note: the University guidance for submitting thesis by portfolio is at <https://www.bath.ac.uk/publications/submitted-an-alternative-format-thesis/attachments/submitted-an-alternative-format-thesis.pdf> , but this is at the discretion of the supervisor. Departments and School may also have introduced their own guidance.

Journal publication

Fritz noted that in Senate today (21st April) there will be a discussion of research quality, including journal publication. It is looking at how to increase the amount of journal publication, and the percentage that are able to achieve publication in high-impact journals. Publication is one of the KPIs for REF so a matter of interest for the University as a whole. He commented that not all departments require PGRs to publish a paper. Fritz emphasised that the Senate discussion would not be including making it a requirement for PGRs, but reflected on whether that might be helpful for doctoral students in their research careers or employability more widely.

A rep from the School of Management reported that they have received concerns from PGRs that some supervisors expect doctoral students to continue working of they finish their PhDs before their funding ends. They commented that the writing-up year has become a pressured year to finish research and publish as well as writing up. Some PhDs even switched to part-time to gain more time. Some others had they supervisors telling them to seek a part-time job. A rep from the Department of Psychology noted that this has also been feedback from some PGRs in the Department of Psychology.

Fritz noted that UKRI tracks the proportion of PGRs who complete in more than four years and will penalise through funding allocation any universities who exceed the maximum permitted.

- 4. Time and date of next meeting:**
Thursday 13th May 2021, 12:30 – 1:30 pm