

Meeting: Doctoral Council

Date & Time: Wednesday 13th May 2021, 12:30 – 13:30

Fritz Ho (Chair)	SU Postgraduate Officer (PGO)
Lorenzo Giunta	Department of Mechanical Engineering
Adam Khan	Department of Chemistry
Soo-Hwa Kim	Department of Mechanical Engineering
Jelena Lagger (Faculty Rep)	School of Management
Alessandro Lucini Paioni	School of Management
Amine Moussa	School of Management
Kai-Cheng Yan	Department of Chemistry
Chloe Burke	Department of Psychology
Anabel Burnley	Department of Psychology
Stefano Cuomo (Doctoral Exec)	Department of Mechanical Engineering
Dan Bowen	Department of Mechanical Engineering
Daniel Warner	Department of Education
Jon Noble	Department of Chemical Engineering
Katharina Hug	School of Management
Jose Muniz Martinez	School of Management
Peter King	Department of Economics
Lukas Ohnoutek	Department of Physics
Jenna James	Department of Politics, Languages & International Studies
Stephanie Hall	Department of Mechanical Engineering
Taghried Abdelmagid	Department of Architecture & Civil Engineering
Tim Stoneman (minutes)	Postgraduate Coordinator, SU (PGC)

1. Matters arising

1.1 Communication for doctoral students purchasing for home working

Fritz noted that he is meeting with the Doctoral College tomorrow (14th May) and will be asking them for updates on progress. Fritz commented that he hoped to provide updates in the Doctoral Reps channel (MS Teams).

2. Postgraduate Officer's Update

2.1 Covid-19 statement

Fritz commented that he has followed this issue up with the University. UDSC (University Doctoral Studies Committee) agreed to set up a working group to consider responses if the methodology of research has been disrupted by Coronavirus. Examiners may ask the doctoral student questions on how Coronavirus has had an effect. When this working group reaches its conclusions, these will feed into guidance

for research examiners.

2.2 Academic Representation Review

Fritz thanked reps for their contributions to this, including those who came to last week's Rep Review. A paper on the doctoral recommendations Rep Review will go to UDSC on 20th May and the full paper will go to Senate in June. Doctoral recommendations include:

- Renaming Doctoral Academic Reps as 'Doctoral Reps' to recognise the holistic nature of the PGR experience.
- Introducing two doctoral rep elections, one in spring and one in autumn.
- Including an open doctoral student business item in SSLCs and FDSCs, making it easier to raise PGR issues

Fritz noted that it would be helpful to formally recognise the contribution of doctoral reps, by inclusion in the degree transcript.

Secretary's note: the document currently used by the University as a degree transcript is the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) <http://www.hear.ac.uk/>. This can include achievements and experiences (e.g. skills training sessions, some volunteer roles) that don't form part of the degree assessment. This is used for doctoral students as well.

2.3 URSA Phase 2 funding extension and live Q&A

Fritz outlined that the University approved a URSA Phase 2 funding extension in March, but there has not yet been an announcement on the opening of applications and the process for this. Fritz expressed disappointment that introduction of the scheme had taken so long from the date it was approved.

Unfunded and non-UKRI students

Fritz also explained what may be termed the UKRI Phase 3 funding extension, for unfunded or non-UKRI funded students, and that announcement of this was made on the UKRI website in March. He noted that he has asked Jeremy Bradshaw and Cathryn Mitchell for more information on when this will be available, but they explained that the UKRI have not yet provided guidance on how applications can be managed. They have checked with UKRI and other GW4 universities but no UKRI guidance has been issued.

Secretary's note: an announcement on URSA Phase 2 funding extension and Research England funding was sent out to all doctoral students by the Doctoral College on 19th May, six days after this meeting.

Tuition fees but not study space

A rep from the School of Management commented that few of the first-year doctoral students has been on campus at all and thus, and therefore could not benefit from any equipment, such as desk or locker. They suggested that paying the full fees does not feel justified, with many not having proper study places due to the pandemic.

Financial burden for self-funded and international PGRs

A rep from the Department of Mechanical Engineering agreed, commenting that self-funded students in particular have only had limited access to the funding extensions and support but are nonetheless expected to pay the full fees even though they've also been unable to access the labs or any of the other resources they are paying for.

Another rep from the School of Management also agreed, noting that international students as well self-funded students had been effectively penalised.

A different rep from the School of Management added that the money PGRs spend on tuition fees could be used to buy equipment, if this is possible, to have a working place

at home. They added that otherwise these students are paying full tuition in addition to extra expenses to work from home.

Funding Q&A

Fritz explained that the SU has requested that the Doctoral College provide a Q&A on funding and funding extensions. It was agreed that this would take place once an announcement had been made on URSA Phase 2 funding extensions, but Fritz commented that the unexpected delay in this had also delayed the Q&A.

A rep from the Department of Chemical Engineering expressed concern that the University had been slow in providing guidance to PGRs on Coronavirus-related issues.

Action: Fritz to follow up with Doctoral College about date of funding Q&A.

2.4 Training for supervisors

The SU have been lobbying the University this year for compulsory training for supervisors, which is an SU Top Ten issue. The University are working on a supervisor resources hub, and are recommending to all supervisors that they go on a training session called Confident Conversations. Fritz noted that in the last Doctoral Council he shared a link to the resource hub, and there was discussion of what supervisor training should include. A paper on supervisory training is going to UDSC on 21st May, and will also need to be approved by Senate, although some senior academics are opposed to the measure. The University has not yet confirmed when it would introduce mandatory supervisory training, and Fritz noted his preference for a road map of when this policy was likely to be implemented.

Fritz added that Jeremy Bradshaw has indicated support for the issue, but will be stepping down in June and the PVC International & Doctoral position will not be renewed. The PVC Research role will be taking on responsibility for doctoral matters.

2.5 PRES/PDES

Fritz thanked reps for their contribution in promoting the surveys. The final response rates for PRES was 28% including visiting students, or 38% excluding visiting students, and for PDES was 18%. This compared to 2019 response rates of 36% for PRES and 16% for PDES. Fritz noted that the data is currently being analysed by the CLT. Once that has been carried out we will produce briefing documents for reps.

A rep from the School of Management asked when PRES/PDES data would be available. Tim responded that there is no firm date for that but the SU will stay in contact with the team in CLT about that.

Secretary's note: headline data was made available by CLT at the end of May, and Fritz shared departmental PRES data and held initial meetings with reps from each department. Detailed analysis, including national benchmarking will be available over the summer.

3. Tuition fee charge

Fritz explained that a PGR with a 3-month extension has contacted him after being required to pay tuition fees for the whole additional year. They were informed by Student Finance that they could then claim money back once they had submitted, on a pro rata basis calculated by week. This would require a significant upfront expenditure, and due to Coronavirus-related extensions many doctoral students could be affected by overcharging in this way.

Fritz has followed this up with the Doctoral College and Student Finance, and clarification for PGRs in this position has now been received:

- If PGRs are extending into a period in which fees is required, they should contact Student Finance to 'temporarily register' until the submission or transfer date.
- If the submission or transfer date is around April, Student Finance can advise students to liaise with Credit Control to extend the date of the second collection point.

Fritz noted that if PGRs are encountering difficulties, they can contact the SU or the Doctoral College.

A rep from the School of Management reported that first-year PGRs in the School have asked if any reduction in fees will be available for first-years. Fritz replied that he was not aware of this, but noted that there was a tuition fee refund campaign running and the SU Education Officer is following up on that. Fritz mentioned that currently he has not received requests from PGRs for tuition fee refunds, but if anyone has comments or requests he will be happy to forward these to them.

4. Doctoral Employability

Fritz shared the new Doctoral Employability Group webpage 'Guide to undertaking a placement, or other work experience activity during your doctorate'. Fritz emphasised that this is a preview version still under construction so may not yet be fully accurate, and asked reps not to share these more widely. He noted that the Doctoral Employability Group are interested in PGR feedback on how these pages met doctoral needs.

Fritz explained that unlike undergraduate and PGT students, PGRs are unlikely to get the opportunity to have a work-based placement as part of their study. Supervisors may also be reluctant for time out of research to happen. The University is still encouraging for work placements to happen, and for that reason the Doctoral College has created these webpages, the first being 'Guide to undertaking a placement, or other work experience activity during your doctorate'. It shows students how to find suitable opportunities, and currently includes sections on:

- Benefits of work experience
- Types of opportunities
- How to find opportunities
- Considerations
- Terms and conditions
- Reflecting on your placement experience
- Case studies

The second page is 'Supporting the career development of doctoral students' to show how the Careers Service and departments can support you and the opportunities they can provide. It includes:

- How you can help
- Support from the Careers Service
- What do doctoral researchers do once they have graduated
- Additional resources

Fritz emphasised that the pages were not yet complete and invited comments and suggestions either in the meeting or afterwards.

5. Confident conversations with directors of studies and supervisors

Fritz noted that the University's Independent Advisor (IA) has produced their 6-monthly report. Following the discussion on bullying and sexual harassment which has followed

since 2019, the University has asked the IA to produce a 6-monthly report, rather than the previous annual report.

The IA reported that doctoral students have conveyed a lack of trust for other points within the University and communications issues with the Doctoral College, directors of studies (DoS) and supervisors. Fritz commented that he would be very interested to find the reasons for this lack of trust for sharing issues. He noted that the fact that the director of studies and supervisor are in the same department may well be a factor, but reflected on whether training and induction may help in enabling confident conversations.

Lack of clarity on DoS role

A rep from the Department of Mechanical Engineering suggested that the problem might be partly by many PGRs not being clear on what the role of the DoS is. They noted that PGRs may fear reprisals because of a lack of confidentiality, and recommended a more formalised contact that bypassed members of the same faculty. While acknowledging that the DoS was briefly introduced in induction, their what their role involves was not conveyed.

DoS introductions at start of year

A rep for the Department of Psychology noted that in the department their DoS introduced themselves and their role at the beginning of the year, which was found to be very helpful.

A rep for the School of Management explained that in the School of Management doctoral students now have two DoS, but one of them is usually personally present at induction. They noted that their presentations are usually very clear in explaining roles and approachability. They noted that their roles sometimes overlap, in some cases not, but that they do effectively coordinate with each other. They suggested that one dealt with overarching 'macro' problems and one was more student-focused, but communication to one would reach the other.

Lack of clarity on who to contact with supervisory problems

A different rep for the Department of Mechanical Engineering outlined that in a survey reps put out PGRs in the department, more than 40% of respondents were 'somewhat unsure or have no idea who to contact if they have problems with their supervisor'.

It was commented by a rep from the Department of Chemical Engineering that while the DoS in the department is very approachable, they felt it was unlikely that PGRs would contact them if there were supervisory problems.

Dos training

Another rep from the School of Management noted that there has been extensive discussion of supervisory training, but suggested that it may be that DoS training was also beneficial. PGRs are directed to DoS not just for administrative matters but also pastoral issues, including supervisory problems and it may be that not all DoS embrace this role.

6. PGWT FAQs

Fritz outlined that he had met with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Learning & Teaching, Peter Lambert, about clarifying responsibility for PGWTs. The University is keen to clarify PGWT issues through an FAQ page, and the SU has been asked to collate FAQs for PGWTs. Fritz shared the list of questions so far and invited reps' suggestions on what these could include.

Fritz noted that the FAQs may include clarification on:

- Responsibilities – Fritz commented that clarity on the parameters of the role may

not have been provided in all cases.

- Recruitment and payment – Fritz noted the recruitment process may differ across departments, although some functions like contracts are handled by HR. There may also be payment for other activities, such as preparation, and this may vary. Clarity on annual leave and sick leave would also be helpful, which may not be available for PGWTs who are not on fractional contracts.
- Training – Fritz explained that both CLT and departments may provide discipline-specific training, but departmental training is more detailed in some departments.
- Support – Fritz noted that support might be needed on health and safety, academic issues, recruitment and payment, and representation and feedback. It would be helpful for PGWTs to be signposted to the sources of that support.
- Identification and recognition – some PGWTs may wish to develop their teaching practice and new academic staff can be supported to work towards associate fellowship of the HEA (Higher Education Academy). Fritz commented that some universities do this for PGWTs as well, but more guidance would be helpful on how this could be achieved at the University of Bath.

Further communication

A rep from the Department for Mechanical Engineering welcomed the progress on FAQ's for PGWTs, but suggested that there would be benefits to building on this to organise a general meeting for each department or faculty with members from HR and the SU to help dispel some of the misconceptions that surround employment at the University. They commented that FAQs are helpful as an initial point of communication, but that there should be more actively promoted information, and PGWTs should be able to forward difficult questions to relevant staff contacts.

AFHEA and training

The rep from the Department of Economics suggested that it would be useful to have information on how to achieve AFHEA accreditation, as well as CLT training and external awards and courses.

Induction and ongoing communication

A different rep from the Department of Mechanical Engineering commented that possibly doctoral students were presented with too much information in induction, which is not then revisited. They noted that useful signposting and information is likely to be missed in this process.

Staff meetings

A rep for the School of Management commented that in the School, PGWTs have contact with the unit convenor but are not invited to staff meetings. They noted that in April and May of 2020 PGWTs were invited, but this is no longer the case. PGWTs asked if they could be added again, perhaps once per month or in a separate meeting, and the School has agreed.

Fritz responded that this positive communication with PGWTs was good to see but that effective channels of communication often did not seem to be in place in departments.

PGWT pay disparity

The rep also suggested that it would be useful for PGWTs to have a clear idea of pay for

the role. They reported that they are aware of PGWTs in similar roles with differing pay, and clarity would be appreciated. They also noted that more information would be helpful on whether preparation or just delivery could be claimed for.

Secretary's note: the University's pay scales have Casual Teaching Assistants, Casual Demonstrators, Casual Markers and Casual Research Associates at spinal point 22 (£14.08/hour), but PGWTs have reported that there is variation in practice.

7. Any other business

7.1 Education Awards

Tim noted that the Education Awards, organised jointly between the SU and the University, had taken place on Friday 7th May with Fritz and Peter Lambert presenting the awards. Doctoral Academic Rep of the Year was won by Fadoua Govaerts, and PGWT of the Year was won by Naomi Heffer. Tim congratulated both of them and shared the SU Doctoral news article with more details

www.thesubath.com/news/article/doctoral/Education-Awards/.

Tim commented that in addition to highlighting Fadoua's achievement, the award gave recognition to Doctoral Academic Reps who do not get enough. He noted that there were extremely strong nominations and it was wonderful to be able to give publicity to the role and the individuals.

Fritz thanked Doctoral Academic Reps for all their work in the past year, and that it had made a real difference. He also acknowledged that the work of reps had helped in his role by raising doctoral issues.

7.2 Post-covid communication

A rep from the School of Management reported that 1st year PGRs have complained of a 'lack of compass', without contact with staff, peers or communication from other channels.

Another rep from the School of Management also reported that

8. Time and date of next meeting:

Thursday 17th June 2021, 12:30 – 1:30 pm