



Meeting: Doctoral Council

Date & Time: Monday 2nd November 2020, 12:00 – 13:30

29 doctoral students attended the forum. Fritz Ho, the SU Postgraduate Officer, thanked doctoral students for attending, and invited comments verbally, in chat or in Jamboard, with link posted.

Attending: Amy Young, SU Insight & Engagement Manager; Tim Stoneman, SU Postgraduate Coordinator (minutes).

1. PGWTs (Postgraduates Who Teach)

- 1.1 **PGWTs and IPT** – Definitely agree with this. Can we share understanding on the increased pressures on academic staff and postgraduates who teach?
- 1.2 Supervisors overloaded with teaching preparation. Even tighter time constraints. The University should at least recognise this.
- 1.3 **Visas:** As a part-time teacher/demonstrator some guidance from the University as to what their plan is for this lockdown and what their plans are for Tier 2 or Tier 3 working would be helpful.
- 1.4 Tim noted that, the SU is co-operating with UCU on a PGWT survey at the moment. With IPT (In-Person Teaching) such an important strategy/approach for the Uni, it's important that PGWTs' safety isn't in any way compromised. It would be useful to know more about what IPT means for doctoral students in practice
- 1.5 **Office furniture** –SPS students received an email from Agresso with instructions and an expenses claim form specifically for furniture. It would be welcome for this option to be available for all students working from home but may be restricted to 'staff'.

2. Study space

- 2.1 **Booking:** More clarity on whether study rooms still bookable during lockdown?
Note: study rooms are still bookable, and with the moving of doctoral study space from 10W, doctoral study space is now [bookable in 8W](#).
- 2.2 **10W:** A clear date w when the School of Management will move out of 10W again would be appreciated.
- 2.3 **Safe working:** Continued, clear communication on where and how we can work, given recent Government announcement of second lockdown.

3. Closure of University (pre-Govt guidance)

Tim noted that in the first lockdown there were 'secondary' effects on research as access to non-University groups and organisations was limited. The breadth of research here is so great, that it remains to be seen what some effects will be, especially where human research participants are involved

- 3.1** It's not clear if there are signs that the University might close due to the second lockdown. In the previous wave we had only 24 hours' notice, and didn't get a chance to prepare well for it. Can we ask that if the University is considering locking down, that we be given a 2-3 day buffer at least?
- 3.2** Amy noted that at the moment the Gov guidance is that universities should remain open (the university did not fully close before, it was still open for students who couldn't return home). As Fritz mentioned the last information The SU received (pre announcement) was that in the case of any further lockdowns the intention was that labs/workshops should remain open.

4. Furlough

Fritz reported that he has been asking the University for more clarification on furlough for doctoral students.

5. Communication

- 5.1 Transparent communication:** there was a request for far more transparent communication from the University. One student referred to a short conversation with a lecturer regarding demonstration work which I'm doing starting this week. Some issues (e.g. the university overpromising certain benchmarks for teaching quality at the cost of feasibility with remote teaching, ignoring certain recommendations from both PGWTs and academic staff.) which were questions raised during the first lockdown remain. There has to be clarity overall.

Amy commented that the SU has continuously pressured the University for is transparent and tailored communication for doctoral students. This is something that we will continue to do. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor International & Doctoral understood the concerns and was going to raise this with other senior managers in the university (this was in response to the survey of doctoral students regarding impact of Covid and new normal - so thank you to everyone who completed that survey!).

- 5.2 Doctoral research community:** one student called for more participation from academic staff in creating research culture. If they were to share something of their research work and progress it would add enormously to the research culture, particularly because often doctoral students choose to come to Bath partly to see more of cutting edge research and to collaborate with leading researchers. It was commented that the Doctoral College hasn't provided this 'big picture' of research to doctoral students.

6. Marginalisation

- 6.1 'Forgotten' PGRs:** It was remarked that the feeling of being "forgotten" resonates with others. One student reported starting their PhD this year and feeling that the University hadn't really engaged with the induction and introduction process at all. Their supervisor and peer mentor have provided strong support but it does feel quite ad hoc and not really that centrally coordinated.
- 6.2 Isolation:** it was commented by a doctoral student that that the PGR isolation issue should be acknowledged by University senior management as well as the 'working bees'. This was agreed with by another doctoral student, who commented that the first step towards resolving issues with people feeling unimportant and underrated is acknowledgement and acceptance that those issues exist and the impact that this is having on their lives.

7. Covid-19 funding support (pre-UKRI report)

Fritz posted in Jamboard the University guidance on different forms of funding support.

- 7.1 UKRI funding:** It was asked if there been any clarification if the extension to funding for UKRI/University funded PhDs will be offered to any whose funding ends after 31 March 2021?

Note: at this time no clarification had been forthcoming from UKRI, but on 11 November the UKRI report made it clear that funded extensions for doctoral students would not be possible and research may need to be adjusted to ensure a research degree can be awarded.

Concerns were raised that no funding is currently planned for people whose research will be unpredictably delayed. Research delays leave some little time to analyse data and write up.

- 7.2 Scheme applications:** it was highlighted that in every funding scheme application doctoral students are rated on "if" we are affected by the pandemic, when everyone has been affected. It was suggested that this should not be based solely on whether doctoral students have to do lab work or not. It was also pointed out that none of the schemes highlight the effects of long-term isolation, lack of supervision, and lack of peer support. It was commented that long-term isolation has affected all doctoral students, who have lost the ability to go to conferences, lost the department community, affected mental health, and created the sense that university has forgotten doctoral students.

It was also noted that applications require doctoral students to "demonstrate genuine Covid-specific disruption". There were concerns that ambiguity might potentially enable the University to reject applications that were deserving of funding.

- 7.3 Research Interruption Scheme:** Clarification was asked on whether the Research interruption scheme if a doctoral student receives a studentship. International students still pay a big amount of tuition fees.

Clarity on whether the scheme allowed lab work was also requested. It was noted that some labs have rotas that mean reduced access, so there is a slow down of work.

8. Health and safety

Doctoral students suggested the following would be helpful for health and safety in home working:

- 8.1 Workplace assessments:** More clarification is needed on who to send information on workstation assessments for working from home to, and what can be done if you identify a problem.
- 8.2 Occupational health:** Advice on how to manage workstation-related health and occupational health problems, as aches and pains have been caused due to incorrect setup at home.
- 8.3 Workstation equipment:** I received info on a scheme to provide equipment for those WFH, requested a desk chair twice using the SHEW form and both were closed without response

9. Wellbeing

- 9.1** There was positive feedback on the new wellbeing service, Be Well - Talk Now. This is a service run by the University Counselling Service, giving access to an adviser by phone or live chat 24/7.

10. What SU events should be run for doctoral students?

- 10.1** It was observed that participating in SU wellbeing activities can be intimidating if doctoral students don't know others. It was noted that this is a difficult issue to address but may deter engagement.

- 10.2** It was suggested that the could SU run similar 'get to know other people' sessions like it did for UGs. It was noted that this could be especially useful for new doctoral students. Others agreed that they would also be interested in such events, particularly if held online or outside of teaching hours.