

Faculty of Natural Sciences Research Student Staff Committee Meeting

Date: 1st February 2017, 12.30-14.00

Venue: Meeting Room: SALC 7

MINUTES

Present:

Ahmed Shamsou (AS)	Chair & GSU Representative
Luke McCrone (LM)	Co-Chair ICU Deputy President (Education)
Paul French (PF)	Vice Dean (Research)
Nazia Hirjee (NH)	Faculty Operations Officer, FoNS
Niki Gounaris (NG)	Director of PG Studies - Life Sciences
Sue Gibson (SG)	Director of the Graduate School
Laura Lane (LL)	Manager of the Graduate School
Kasia Kmiecowski (KK)	Administrative Assistant
Yusrah Al-Gharebawi	First Year Research Representative
Emma Coakley	Third Year Research Representative
Ashley Reaney	LS Silwood Research Representative
Sonia Rebollo Ramirez	LS SK Research Representative
Sabrina Slater	LS SK Research Representative
Michael Thomson	LS SK Research Representative
Elysia Sharma	Experimental Solid State Physics Group Representative
Luke Phillipson	Space & Atmospheric Physics Group Representative
Jack Maxwell	Photonics Group Rep and Physics PG Representative
Alexander Adler	AWO-FoNS
Marina Amado Ferreira	Applied Mathematics and Mathematical Physics Rep

Apologies:

Rebecca Middleton (RM)	FoNS Education Coordinator
Matthew Fuchter	Director of Postgraduate Studies- Chemistry
Henrik Jensen	Director of Postgraduate Studies- Mathematics
Stefan Maier	Director of Postgraduate Studies- Physics
Jem Woods	Director of Postgraduate Studies (or equivalent) - CEP
Karen Makuch	Co - Director of Postgraduate Studies (or equivalent) - CEP
Luke Delmas	Second Year Research Representative
Arman Khaledian	Finance Representative
Luca Mingarelli	Maths Department Research Representative
Kai Seow	Photonics Group Representative

1. Welcome and Apologies

AS and PF welcomed the attendees to the meeting and apologies, as above, were noted.

PF explained briefly that the purpose of the Faculty Research Student Staff Committee is:

- To provide an additional communication channel between the Faculty, Graduate School and Departments – but not to replace any interactions between research students with their Departments or the Graduate School.
- To understand the needs of FoNS research students and to help explain what resources are available and how to obtain them

- To hear both positive and negative experiences from research students with a view to improving the overall research student experience in FoNS.

2. Terms of Reference and Membership (Paper 1)

The committee noted the *Terms of Reference and Membership*.

3. Reports from Research Student Representatives:

3.1 Chemistry

- Student Representative reported that a number of free PG courses had been organised and students had found them very useful.
- It was reported that the temperature control in laboratories does not work properly, which can affect experiments. The temperature can be too high or too low (last summer 36°C had been noted). PF advised that the Departments should be notified about this issue at the time and a record of the temperature should be kept. It was also reported that a fridge does not work properly and the chemicals within it cannot be stored safely. PF stressed that any safety issues should be raised immediately with the Department.
ACTION: NH to raise the issue of defects with the Department of Chemistry.
- Student Representative raised concerns about overcrowded Synthesis and Catalysis laboratory. It was noted that some supervisors have too many students using the same fume hood, and such overcrowding creates concerns from a safety perspective.
ACTION: NH to raise the overcrowded Synthesis and Catalysis laboratory issue with the Chemistry Department and its H&S officers.
- Student Representative reported that occasionally 1st Year PhDs supervise UG students doing research projects due to shortage of staff. It was noted that students must be supervised by appropriately trained individuals who have been judged to be competent to take on this responsibility.
ACTION: NH to report to Department and its H&S officers the concerns about 1st Year PhDs supervising UG students due to shortage of staff.
- Student Representative queried whether MRes students are entitled to a desk space and a PC. NH explained that each PhD student should be provided with a desk and PC whereas this is not guaranteed for MRes students. However, PF said that project supervisors should ensure that their MRes students are provided with a PC or access to computing resources as appropriate when this is an essential tool required to complete the project.
- Student Representatives confirmed that Chemistry students had been consulted on the design of laboratories and offices at White City. This had been appreciated by the students who are awaiting further updates on the relocation of Chemistry Research to White City.

3.2 Life Sciences

- Student representative reported that, although there is a very positive atmosphere among the members of Life Sciences community, there are some issues with the communication between students based in Silwood and other Departments. It was noted that some Silwood students had not been aware of various activities that had taken place throughout the autumn term. LL said that Graduate School would be willing to arrange some events at Silwood Campus and asked Student Representatives to provide her with a list of courses that Silwood students would wish to attend.

ACTION: Life Sciences Student Representatives to provide LL with a list of courses that Silwood students would wish to attend at their campus.

- It was reported that some buildings at Silwood Campus, such as Lees, remain empty for prolonged periods of time and Silwood students had felt that it would be useful to know when particular buildings are occupied and at what periods they remain empty.

ACTION: NH to raise this issue with the Department and ensure that any communications about buildings include students in the distribution.

- Some concerns were reported in relation to constraints for the new supervisors who cannot apply for a studentship in their first year of lectureship. Consequently, they are unable to build labs for new research projects. Student Representative queried the reason for such constraints.

ACTION: NH to investigate and feedback at the next committee meeting.

- It was reported that there is a large number of Masters students (about 150) in comparison with about 30 PhD students. There was some discussion about the levels of supervision that could be provided to Masters students given the small number of Postdocs/PhD students. PF noted that there was no requirement for PhD students to supervise Masters students. Masters students and UG MSci students doing research projects are essentially embedded in research groups and should be treated collegiately, e.g. as team members who may need help to learn new skills and appropriate ways of working. It is the supervisors' responsibility to ensure Masters/UG students are properly supervised and if PhD students are part of this arrangement, it should be with their agreement.

- It was reported that there are not enough desks for PhD students in the SAF Building. In addition, there were issues with arranging PCs for PhD students at the start of the course. It was felt that a better communication between PhD students, their supervisors and the administrative staff is needed.

- It was suggested that more cross-Department events could be organised at South Kensington Campus. This would give Life Sciences students an opportunity to meet PhD students from other disciplines. In response to that, LL said that funding towards such events can be obtained from the Graduate School. She added that all students are also welcome to attend the College wide events organised throughout the year. PF informed the Student Representatives that the Faculty plans to run a cross-Department *FoNS Research Seminar Series* to which PhD students will be invited. This will give them the opportunity to meet postdocs and academics from all FoNS Departments as well as to hear talks from the key speakers. (Note the first Research Seminar will be on March 10).

- Student Representative reported that the autoclave had not been working properly. In response to that, NH said that this issue is being addressed by an autoclave replacement project, which is anticipated to be completed during the summer. It was also noted that the heating in the Sir Ernst Chain Building did not seem work where rooms had been extremely cold whereas it is very hot during summer months in the Flowers Building.

ACTION: NH to discuss the temperature control issues with the Department for escalation to Estates.

- Student Representative requested further information about the planned transport links between the South Kensington and Silwood. LM will ask the union to provide mini-

bus service to be arranged on Wednesday's afternoons between both campuses to enable Silwood students to attend social events.

- Student representatives requested some advice on notifying supervisors about holidays. It was stressed that students are entitled and expected to go on holiday. They should give as much notice as possible to the supervisors when requesting leave and try to ensure that it does not clash with important stages of their project that require their presence. It was suggested that supervisors should make sure that students understand the entitlement to leave and perhaps could request information about planned absences from their students at the start of the year.

3.3 Mathematics

- Student Representative queried whether social events could be organised more frequently to give students extra opportunities to meet. LL said that the Graduate School can assist with organising social events by providing the funding towards room hire, drinks and nibbles. She encouraged the Student Representative to contact her for further details, should they wish to apply for such funding.
- Student Representative requested a water dispenser for use by Maths students (noting that currently they are using the one in Physics Level 6). PF advised that this issue should be raised with the Department of Mathematics who should provide their students with drinking water.

3.4 Physics

- It was reported that some students had questioned the purpose of the English language test to be taken at the start of the course by overseas students, including those who had already obtained their UG degree in the UK. SG explained that the results of English language test help with identifying students who will need further support provided by the Centre for Academic English. PF observed that having strong writing skills is important generally and particularly for researchers, who will be submitting research proposals or fellowship applications. Therefore, the College wants to ensure that students who need to enhance their writing skills receive appropriate support.
- Student Representative reported that in the Physics building coffee cups are made of polystyrene and asked whether biodegradable cups could be provided.

ACTION: NH to make enquiries of Campus Services.

3.5 CEP

Student Representative reported that:

- Graduate School offers excellent funding towards trips (such as Eden Project) and social events. It covers the costs of room hire, drinks and nibbles.
- Social media are a good platform to inform students about various solutions to typical problems experienced while studying at the College. He encouraged Student Representatives to share their solutions rather than just raising issues.
- Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) will open on Tuesday 25 April 2017 and close on Thursday 18 May 2017. Students will receive a personalised email inviting them to participate in the survey. He encouraged Student Representatives to disseminate this information as it will give students an opportunity to comment on their programme and overall experience at the College.

4. Report from the Graduate School

LL reported that the following initiatives and opportunities are available to research students:

- Interactive Webinar training sessions – they last only one hour and would be particularly useful for students from Silwood because students do not need to travel to South

Kensington to attend. Webinars are accessible from labs, offices, off-site etc. Completion of webinars also counts towards the professional skills requirement.

- Global Fellows Programmes – For this year, the school will be held at TUM, Munich (Cities of the Future) and, in July, a Tsinghua Global Fellows Programme will be held focussing on Climate Change.
- Residential Retreats focusing on improving communication, thesis writing or to explore the concept of research impact and influence.
- Doctoral Student Coaching Programme - to provide students with an opportunity to talk, independently from their academic Department, and in confidence, about challenges experienced when studying for doctorate.

5. Chair's business

- Brexit – AS reported that students from Europe can raise any issues via College's central support.
- Student Academic Choice Awards SACA - AS reported that on-line nominations for the Student Academic Choice Awards 2017 are now open and encouraged Student Representatives to nominate an Imperial's academic or professional staff to reward them for excellence or innovation.

6. Any other business

a) Update on Library air-con situation

KK reported that, in response to Student feedback related to problems with temperature control in the Central Library, the College is planning some major building works to resolve this issue. The initial building works had been scheduled to take place during the spring term (starting 24 January), to allow the full project to go ahead in the summer. Work likely to cause noise will take place between 6am - 9am where possible, to cause minimum disruption to students working in the library.

7. Dates of Future Meeting: Wednesday 10th May 2017, 12.30-14.00, Room - SAF 120