

DATE: Wednesday 30 November 2022

TIME: 13:30 – 15:00

LOCATION: HXLY 642, Huxley Building and via MS Teams

MINUTES

1. Welcome and Apologies

Present:

Xinyi	Guo (XG)	FoNS Postgraduate Research Academic & Welfare Officer (Chair)
Mike	Tennant (MT)	Vice-Dean (Education)
Rebecca	Middleton (RM)	Head of Education and Student Experience, FoNS (Co-Chair)
Paul	French (PF)	Vice-Dean (Research)
John	Seddon (JS)	Faculty Senior Tutor
Magdalena	Jara (MJ)	Head of Pedagogy and GTA Programme Leader, Graduate School
James	Wilton-Ely (JWE)	Director of Postgraduate Studies, Chemistry
Ryan	Barnett (RB)	Director of Postgraduate Studies, Mathematics
Ioannis	Kountouris (IK)	Director of Postgraduate Studies, CEP
Ben	Sauer (BS)	Director of Postgraduate Studies, Physics
Ngoc Thuy	Nguyen (NT)	Department PGR Rep, CEP
Molly	Parry (MP)	Department PGR Rep, Chemistry
Kamilla	Rekvenyi (KR)	Department PGR Rep, Mathematics
Michaela	Flegrova (MF)	Department PGR Rep, Physics
Ellie	Gleave (EG)	Department PGR Rep, Physics

In Attendance:

Monica	Parrondo-Calleja	Administrative Assistant, FoNS
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Apologies:

Matt	Horsfield (MH)	Education Support Coordinator (Secretary), FoNS
David	Mann (DM)	Director of Postgraduate Studies, Life Sciences
Jason	Zheng	ICU Deputy President – Education
Tatiana	Rizou (TR)	Department PGR Rep, Crick

2. Terms of Reference and Membership 2022-23

- The committee reviewed noted the terms of reference (TOR) and membership 22-23. The only change made was in terms of membership but not in terms of the remit.
- JWE reported that he would be stepping down as DPS at the end of the calendar year and would be replaced Rudiger Woscholski.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the previous meeting held on 04 May 2022.

4. Matters arising from the minutes and review of action tracker

The action tracker was reviewed, and actions were marked as complete with updated comments:

- Action 1 - Complete and closed. JWE confirmed that there are plans to expand the current Common Room Café for students. He also mentioned that other options were now available such as the new restaurant that had just opened at the Uren building and Benugo Café although it did not offer discount to students.
- Action 2 - Complete and closed. RM confirmed that she had contacted the Faculty finance team regarding students paying for social events etc. and submitting expense claims and had emailed the response to Student Reps on 11 May 2022, which was as follows: The only way that non-staff members can claim expenses is via the expenses form attached. I'd encourage any of you wishing to pay for social events etc. to speak to your Department (your Director of PG Studies, for example, but will depend on the Department) to ask for the Department to pay for any items, rather than you paying for them yourselves and trying to claim the money back. Another alternative suggested was using the Faculty virtual credit card as a last resort.

5. Reports from Department Student Representatives:

5.1 CEP

The detailed report document was noted by the committee and NT presented the key matters arising from the report.

- Involvement in new social activities with three-minute presentations from PhD students. The change of the format aims for a more interactive event between Faculty and PhD students.
- A Q&A finance session has been organised to respond to the concerns raised on the lengthy process to claim expenses back.
- Lack of opportunities for internships and career advancement for PhD students.
- Supervision: It was highlighted that there is a perceived lack of mechanisms for conflict resolution. It was noted that when students go to supervisors for advice that is not academic related (i.e. mental health issues) the supervisor directs the student to internally within the CEP, to a senior tutor within the Department instead of signposting to support available within the university.
- RM reported that last September there had been some training for senior and postgraduate tutors and that a list of signposting links had been made available to all who had attended that training course.

Action 1: RM to send the list of signposting links to the Senior Tutors in CEP.

- IK commented that there was a strong support system within CEP run by senior tutors when it comes to PhD students and noted that the resources were well known in the Department. He suggested that PhD students facing mental health issues should contact either their senior tutor or the Head of Department.
- In regard to limited GTA opportunities, he noted that in the past they had run only single a Master's course, so opportunities for GTA work were limited. HE noted that in the last couple of years they had attempted to increase the number of opportunities

available for PhD students with most Friday sessions being run by them. The plan is to increase these with the aim to engage more students.

- In terms of lack of opportunities for internships and career advancement, NT raised concern that some students had experienced resistance in terms of supporting interruption of studies (IoS) for internships and IK suggested flagging this issue up at the bi-weekly meetings with the reps.
- MT asked the committee (staff and students) what their opinions were of PhD student taking internships which are not necessarily related to their research. The view from the staff was that this had to be negotiated with the supervisors on a case-by-case basis. From the student perspective, NT mentioned that there were two different processes: External study leave (where an internship is related to research) and IoS (where not relevant to research).
- NT mentioned that the Business School had provided a one off £1,000 to support their PhD students and asked whether FoNS would be prepared to provide the same level of support.
- RM confirmed that there were no current plans at Faculty management level to provide a similar payment to PhD Students and mentioned other alternatives available such as the College Hardship Fund and the Deans Fund where students need to be nominated by the Department.
- Six-month confidentiality report: Some concern was raised that the word document format was not confidential. RM reported that she had been reassured by the Interim Director for CEP that there was a robust process in place for dealing with matters confidentially.

5.2 Chemistry

No detailed report document was received. MP presented a verbal report of the key matters arising in the Department.

- MP welcomed the progress made at White City in regard to the food options available on campus.
- GTA rates on the whole are good in Chemistry however, with the cost-of-living crisis it is becoming more competitive to get these roles.

5.3 Crick

The detailed report document provided by TR was noted by the committee, but no verbal report was provided as there were no student representatives present.

5.4 Life Sciences

No detailed report document was received and not verbal report of the key matters arising was provided due to lack of student representatives at the meeting.

5.5 Mathematics

No detailed report document was received. KR presented a verbal report of the key matters arising in the Department.

- GTA issues already discussed under item 5.5
- KR brought up the issue of EDI Faculty training raised at the previous meeting under AOB item where it was advised to tackle this at Department level rather than at Faculty level. She reported that two EDI courses had been organised, but that both had had very poor attendance and suggested making EDI training compulsory for PhD students.
- MJ reported that making attendance compulsory was difficult to get approved but agreed that it would be beneficial to promote attendance. However, she noted at College level it would take a long time to achieve this.

- MT reported that making something of that nature compulsory carried a risk of alienating more people than creating allies.
- RM suggested asking students the reason why students didn't attend the events.
- EG reported that statistics for sexual violence and harassment at Imperial were not good. She mentioned that Physics had experienced problems regarding sexual harassment for the past few years and felt that more was needed to be done to address this, especially in terms of consent training.
- RM commented she had attended a College level student experience committee meeting this morning where the statistics and reports for sexual harassment were presented. She noted that although making the consent training compulsory is not off the cards entirely it would be tricky. She informed the committee of plans to roll the training out across the College to all students at all levels.

5.6 Physics

The detailed report document was noted by the committee and MF presented the key matters arising from the report.

- MF raised some concern that no student consultation had taken place at both levels (UG and PG) in regard to the Departmental review in Physics. No communication about possible changes had been received from the Department by PG Student Reps.
- GTA pay differences: There is a perception that some Departments pay their GTAs more for the same level of work.
- RM confirmed that GTAs in FoNS were paid at the College levels and that there were two different levels of pay. In the Faculty of Engineering, pay was much more varied, with different levels that don't align with the College levels. She stressed that it came down to the type and level of work the students are doing.
- KR noted the lack of GTAs within the Maths Department as the pay was not attractive and RM noted that the type of work done there, was different to that done in Departments that ran labs, for example.
- RM agreed that it would be useful to discuss further and possibly at Faculty level and that she would share information she had collated on levels of pay across the College.
Action 2: RM to share information on GTA pay rates with student committee members.
- MF asked the rest of the reps to share any ideas involving alcohol-free focussed social events.
- In regard to the Departmental review BS commented that after the PG SSC meeting, he had sent an email to all the PG students informing them that the review process was taking place, but no further details were provided. He had also flagged it up to the Head of Department and noted the lack of student involvement in the process. RM reported that she had spoken to the Department Operation Manager at the beginning of the process about student involvement and she was reassured that they would be involved.
- BS commented that the external review board had been scheduled for two weeks' time and would be meeting with undergraduate students. MF confirmed that PG representatives had not been invited and BS agreed to chase this up within the Department
Action 3: BS to chase within the Department to invite PG representatives to the Physics external review board meeting

6. Chair's business

- Nothing to be raised.

7. Minutes of the PhD Departmental Student Staff Committee Meetings (to note)

Minutes noted.

8. Any other business

- MJ mentioned the GTA framework had just been updated and it would be published imminently. She reported that one of the key updates is that GTA roles are ringfenced to PhD students only.

9. Dates of Future Meetings

Committee	Date	Time
FoNS - Research Student Staff Committee	Wed 15/02/2023	13.30-15.00
FoNS - Research Student Staff Committee	Wed 03/05/2023	13.30-15.00