

Faculty of Natural Sciences Research Student Staff Committee Meeting

Date: 09 May 2018, 12.30-14.00

Venue: SAF 120

MINUTES

Present:

Luke McCrone (LMc)	GSU President- Chair
Paul French (PF)	Vice-Dean (Research)
Emma McCoy (EMc)	Vice-Dean (Education)
Alexandre Adler (AA)	GSU Vice-President- Representation
Luke Delmas (LD)	GSU Academic and Welfare Officer (Physical Sciences) & 3 rd Year PhD Rep
Rebecca Lane (RL)	Y1 PhD Rep- Chemistry
Melissa Lee (ML)	Pure Rep - Maths
Jack Maxwell (JM)	Physics Dept Rep
Alex Siddle (AS)	Space and Atmospheric Physics Group Rep
Deniz Pirincci Ercan (DPE)	Francis Crick Institute Student Rep
Niki Gounaris (NG)	Director of Postgraduate Studies-Life Sciences
Jem Woods (JW)	Director of Postgraduate Studies- CEP
Matt Fuchter (MF)	Director of Postgraduate Studies-Chemistry
Niki Gounaris (NG)	Director of Postgraduate Studies-Life Sciences
Bill Proud (BP)	Director of Postgraduate Studies - Physics
Sue Gibson (SG)	Director of the Graduate School
Nazia Hirjee (NH)	Faculty Operations Officer
Laura Lane (LL)	Head of Strategy and Operations Graduate School
Anderson Santos (AS)	Postgraduate Administrator-Maths
Rebecca Middleton (RM)	Faculty Education Manager

Apologies:

Yusrah Al-Gharebawi	Chemistry Research Student Representative
Henrik Jensen	Maths Director of Postgraduate Studies
Sonia Rebollo Ramirez	Life Science PhD Rep
Katia Hougaard	Life Sciences PhD Rep

1. Welcome and Apologies

LMc welcomed members to the committee and apologies, as above, were noted.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 21 February 2018 (Paper 1a)

The Minutes were confirmed as an accurate record of the meeting.

With reference to **Item 4.3** (and **Action 18**), AS noted that although there had been no formal SSC in Maths, due to the PRECEPT Review, there had been other opportunities for students to discuss matters with staff. AS noted that the first SSC of 2017/18 would be taking place on 06 June.

It was also noted that the Department had implemented a list of key staff and student reps, including photos and full contact details to signpost students to sources of help. AS agreed to send the template for this to RM so that it could be shared with the other departments.

ACTION: AS to send the template for the Maths contacts list this to RM so that it can be shared with the other departments.

LL noted that the Graduate School had produced a welfare flyer that she would send to RM for distribution to committee members. The flyer provides a summary of mental health and wellbeing support that the Graduate School offers students, for example, coaching, resilience training, stress management and other 1-2-1 support.

ACTION: LL to send Graduate School welfare flyer to RM for distribution to committee.

3. Review of Actions (Paper 1b) and matters arising from the previous meeting

The action tracker was reviewed and updated.

With reference to **Action 13**, which related to supporting students to continue to write up when their funding had run out, PF, LL and SG noted the various discussions that had taken place and actions that were being implemented, including the following:

- development of a standardised Welcome letter, to be sent to all new PhD students which would include, amongst other key information, clear details of the source, amount and duration of funding.
- development of the Mutual Expectations for the Research Degree Partnership Document
- proposed future development of the new student records system to track funding periods against submission dates
- changing PhD students' official conferral date from the date of thesis submission to the date that corrections are approved.

The committee discussed the topic of funding in some detail, with the following issues raised:

- that once funding ran out, other than the college Hardship Fund, which is only applicable in specific circumstances, there was no financial support available to PhD students other than what may or may not be provided by supervisors.
- that PhD projects should be designed around the funding available to ensure that students did not run out of funding before completion
- that it could be difficult to precisely predict how long a PhD would take
- that some DTP/ CDT students- in Maths and Life Sciences- were required to complete a compulsory unpaid internship lasting a number of months and that, although this experience was popular with students, the time spent on their PhD was reduced

PF asked the committee to confirm whether there were significant concerns about DTP/ CDT programmes that included a compulsory placement- that these significantly shortened the duration of the funded research, which could in turn disadvantage students and cause undue stress. The committee agreed that this was a serious concern. It was agreed that LL would raise this at the next CDT DTP Governance Committee to gather the views of the CDT Directors.

Action: LL to seek the views of CDT Directors on the impact of internships on funding/submission rates.

4. Reports from Research Student Representatives:

4.1 Chemistry

There were no specific items to report. It was noted that the Departments key focus was on the imminent move to White City.

4.2 Life Sciences

There were no Life Sciences student reps present.

NG noted that the next Life Science SSC would take place on 23 May and that any issues raised earlier in the year had been dealt with at Department level.

4.3 Mathematics

ML noted that there had been a particular focus on support for mental health this year, with the contacts list developed to assist students in finding sources of help.

It was noted that some PhD students were not aware of the existence of the Welfare Tutor, but that he had been invited to events so that he could meet students.

ML noted that various events had been organised, including a talk by SIAM (The Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics) and a session entitled 'What happens at a viva', which is planned to be an annual event.

It was also noted that a formal handover between incoming/ outgoing reps was planned.

4.4 Physics

The Physics reps noted that they were planning a joint social event with Maths for the summer- details tbc.

4.5 CEP

There were no CEP reps present.

4.6 Crick

DPE raised some questions on behalf of Crick-based students, relating to the topics below:

- Whether it was a requirement for there to be an IC PI on the thesis committee
- Whether Crick students needed to extend their registration
- Availability and organisation of social events

LL confirmed that the Crick regulations stipulate that there must be a member of Imperial academic staff on the Thesis Committee. It was also confirmed that the Crick and Imperial were working together to ensure the 4th year registration process ran smoothly. LL confirmed that she would meet with the DPE after the meeting to discuss Crick social events after the committee..

The committee noted that there was some confusion relating to the regulations relating to External Examiners for Crick based PhDs. LL noted that because UCL and Kings were members of the Crick partnership, which the College classified as a consortium arrangement, this meant that external examiners could not normally be appointed from UCL or KCL. However, exceptional cases could be made. PF noted that this significantly narrowed the pool of available external examiners.

LL agreed to check the wording of the regulations for clarification on this.

ACTION: LL to check regulatory wording in relation to the engagement of External Examiners for Crick-based programmes.

5. Chair's Business

LMc noted that this was the last meeting of 2017/18 and thanked members for their contributions.

LMc also asked outgoing Reps to consider their handover with incoming Reps and requested that they consider preparing a one-page handover document.

6. AOB

6.1 Update from FoNS Student Social Committee

LD noted that the last event, organised for 19 April, had been well attended.

He noted that this year, the committee had focused on organising seminars, encouraging student speakers, and on making these events a success. They planned to expand this to social events and would be organising a pizza party after the seminar planned for June.

PF noted that he was keen for the committee to begin organising some cross- department socials and noted that funding could be made available for this.

7. Dates of Future Meeting:

It was confirmed that meeting dates for 2018/19 would be as follows:

Mon 19/11/18	15.00-16.30 (preceded by a Student Rep induction/ training session delivered by the ICU and Graduate School)
Weds 20/02/19	12.30-14.00
Weds 08/05/19	12.30-14.00