

AHSS PGR FORUM, 27 OCTOBER 2020

In attendance:

Staff

Jane Chukwu, Vice President Postgraduate (JC)
Rob Gossedge, Dean for Postgraduate Studies (RG)
Taz Jones, Student Voice Coordinator (TJ)
Dena Stephens, Executive Support Assistant *Minutes*
Annabel Hurst, Catering (AH)
Paul Jones, IT (PJ)
Jane Harding, Student Advice (JH)
Ben Lewis, Student Support & Wellbeing (BL)
Geraint Evans, Academic & Student Support Services (GE)

Students

Bill Hawkes, SHARE (BH)
John Poole, CARBS (JP)
Josie Cray, ENCAP (JCr)
Ianto Gruffydd, WELSH (IG)
Elena Barron Himsworth, MLANG (EBH)
Anna Saunders GEOPL (AS)
Tiansheng Yang, CARBS (TY)
Diego Bermudez Bermejo, CARBS (DBB)
Yang Sun, CARBS (YS)
Sarah Oufan, CARBS (SO)
Suzanna Nesom, CARBS (SN)

JC opened the meeting at 14:00 and opened the floor to student reps.

BH reported no current issues due to close proximity to the start of term.

EBH queried the role of PGR tutors in terms of contractual and employment rights and raised a concern over lack of provision for sickness protection in cases of self-isolation. RG replied that this has been a long-standing HR issue, whereas the role is viewed as a learning opportunity rather than teaching. There is a meeting scheduled on 16 November, at which this will be discussed, and JC will be in attendance.

ACTION: JC to extend meeting invite to Hebe Fletcher.

JCr raised two points:

1. Access to university e-mail account after Viva

ACTION: PJ will look into this and report back

2. Facility for the library to post books to students

PJ highlighted licencing issue restrictions around certain journal articles but will investigate. An issue around 2020 graduates still in possession of loaned books was reported, which is currently being dealt with. It was also reported that the extension of the click and collect scheme is a priority. Another priority is PG study space, and hopefully the current two hour time limit will be extended. EBH added that MLANG students were also keen to exploit any extended time slots. With the forthcoming mid-term assessment period approaching, RG stated that it would be interesting to monitor library space uptake for both UG and PG students.

ACTION: PJ to investigate logistics around the remote loan of journals.

JP echoed JCr's library-related query, asking whether any postal service would be available to international students. RG replied that due to copyright issues, it would not. However, a scanning service is being offered instead.

AS stated that although there was currently nothing to report, they would communicate the contents of the meeting to the school.

IG enquired about study space in the School of Welsh and asked about the logistics of opening up study spaces within. RG confirmed that a study arrangement questionnaire was sent to all schools, which should now be completed. This takes each request for study space on a case by case basis, depending on how each school can best accommodate such need. The School of Welsh is quite far progressed on this matter, but given that priority is currently assigned to safety assessments on teaching spaces, requests for space in other areas might take a little longer. This is, however, work in progress. EBH queried the questionnaire, expressing a concern that the questions seem to be very closed with no provision to expand on any needs requested. RG replied that the questionnaire is currently to gauge need in terms of numbers and confirmed that MLANG, like the School of Welsh, is dealing with all requests.

DBB asked about the provision of equipment for those studying remotely. RG confirmed that IT are working on all known existing issues and are in the process of expanding provision for those students who also tutor.

SO queried the waiting list for the Doctorial Academy desk allocation turnaround. Can it be expedited? RG confirmed that the first batch is imminent, but H&S concerns around Covid and other wider issues have slowed the process. Successful students have been notified, though.

YS raised three questions.

The aforementioned study arrangement questionnaire and how the future movements of international students will be addressed. Many travel plans have been changed after students initially indicated their return to the UK, meaning that a significant level of uncertainty prevails. RG replied that it's acceptable to estimate future travel arrangements and dates for the questionnaire. Remote study is allowed for the year, but students are obliged to keep the university up to date with their current location in order that Tier 4 rules can be adhered to.

PGR extensions: the current three month blanket extension isn't sufficient. How can this be queried? Is it at school or university level? RG confirmed that students are eligible to apply for a further extension of 28 days, and that this would be the school's decision.

A drastic decrease in available tutor slots for PGR teaching. Only three out of a cohort of fifteen in CARBS have been offered a teaching opportunity. Given that some students rely on the income that teaching provides, can this be addressed? JP echoed this concern, highlighting an inconsistency in allocation. JP noted that that a number of students have had no opportunities to teach, yet one student has been allocated four classes. Although JP has been trying to raise this concern at school level, there has been no response as yet.

ACTION: RG to take offline, and will liaise with both YS and JP about this matter.

TY also queried the study arrangement questionnaire in terms of international students, raising a concern that there is no provision to expand on future plans. If the student is undecided in this regard, how best to respond? RG stated that the questionnaire was an opportunity to gauge current activity rather than future plans. Similar questionnaires will be distributed periodically in the future, which will give the opportunity to provide an update.

Soozy, CARBS??? stated that all relevant issues had already been raised.

Marking the end of student queries, JC then asked the staff in attendance for relevant updates.

JH introduced the Student Advice service within the Students' Union, which is a free, confidential facility that offers advice to all Cardiff University students. Although not part of the university, the service works closely with university departments and student support in order to provide a wide service that specialises in housing and academic advice. Indeed, it's the latter that attracts the highest number of queries and the service provided in this instance is unique; there is nowhere else in the locality that gives free advice on this matter. In terms of PG advice, Student Advice is able to offer a confidential service including guidance on study adjustments that empowers the student's decision making process. Additionally, there is an awareness and appreciation of the context surrounding extenuating circumstances and how this can affect sponsors and funding, etc. Student Advice can also help with any complaints or concerns. Although there is an official process with which the department works, the emphasis is on a proactive and hopefully informal resolution. In terms of housing advice, the different needs of PG students are taken into account and advice is provided on matters such as international students moving to the area, checking tenancy contracts and accommodation issues such as disrepair and the return of deposits. There is an office on the third floor of the SU, but operations are currently all online. If you want to get in touch, please email advice@cardiff.ac.uk.

ACTION: JH to share Doctorial Academy information with the group

PJ briefed the meeting on the role of IT and advised that the IT Service Desk should be the first point of all IT-related queries at it-servicedesk@cardiff.ac.uk. However, if the query is urgent or response not timely, then please feel free to escalate to PJ at jonesp11@cardiff.ac.uk. PJ further added that the Zoom facility as provided by the university can be used for calling friends and family in addition to study and is free from any time restrictions.

GE introduced the Digital Education Support Service. This is a facility that supports those learning and teaching online and offers training if needed. Useful link here that contains all relevant information:

https://learningcentral.cf.ac.uk/webapps/blackboard/content/listContentEditable.jsp?content_id=5533701_1&course_id=403438_1&mode=reset

AH stated that the university catering service is now offering a click and collect service, which can be used from six days in advance to half an hour before opening. Catering in the Julian Hodge building is now also open. If anyone has any catering-related questions or feedback, please email foodanddrink@cardiff.ac.uk. AH also asked attendees to remain vigilant to anyone struggling at this time and to refer them to Catering, who will do their best to help. Whilst vending machines haven't been restocked (due to an ongoing conversation regarding whether it's safe to do so in relation to Covid), some products are still available.

JC expanded upon the staff statements, emphasising that students should not hesitate to get in touch with anyone above, and also herself, Taz Jones and Rob Gossedge.

Any other business

RG suggested that it might be worthwhile to feed back on the outcome of the meeting to be held on 16 November. He also alluded to the large amount of emails currently being sent (especially to PGR tutors in AHSS) and asked whether it might be worth using the module function in Learning Central for newsletters and the like? The response was positive.

ACTION: RG to send a general update after November's meeting

ACTION: RG to investigate viability of using Learning Central for newsletters

JC closed the meeting at 15:12.