Postgraduate Research Representatives' Forum

Thursday 20th September 2018, 15:00-17:00
Sir Donald Walter's Boardroom, Cardiff University Students' Union

Cardiff University Students' Union Staff in Attendance:
Jake Smith (VP Postgraduate Students)
Jennifer Kent (VP Heath Park Students)
Holly Thomas (Student Voice Co-ordinator)
Emily O'Riordan (Student Voice Assistant)
Jackie Yip (VP Education)

Cardiff University Staff in Attendance:
Martin Kayman (Postgraduate Dean for AHSS)
Emma Kidd (Postgraduate Dean for BLS)

1. Welcome and Minutes of the Last Meeting

JS welcomed attendees to the meeting and updated on last meeting's actions:
- Postgraduate support group - has been published
- Licencing for movies in SU
- University wide review on progress monitoring – PGR regulations in general are being re-written
- Mentoring scheme

HT recommended to check with the School first about movie nights as the SU does have some problems with paying for licensing.

JS explained there has been some issues with the mentoring scheme and that the SU is now in process of making a buddy scheme for older and younger students, which would include postgraduates.

JS also explains JY and JK run the College Forums for UG and PGT students.

2. Updates from the Students' Union/Postgraduate Executive

JS explained the main task for the summer was preparation for the new semester and there have been postgraduate-only welcome events organised:
- 20th September – Welcome talk
- 22nd September – PG meet and mingle

- 24th September – Taf meet up
- Other quiz and pizza nights and meet and mingles

To include additional PhD only events:
- 5th October – Meet and mingle
- 8th October – Quiz and pizza night

JS also explained that in response to PG feedback they will be running postgraduate only day trips:
- 6th October - Margam County Park
- 13th October – Stonehenge & Salisbury
- 20th October - Rhossili Bay

JS also added that applications are currently open to join the PG exec; a committee of PGT and PGR who campaign on issues and run PG events. Applications close on 10th October.

JS explained that his page on the SU website had been updated with information on the new PG priorities for this year.

3. Updates from Reps

explained that there will be 5 more PhD students next year, so more people in our office, but we don't have a problem with that. We are trying to publicise the PGR internal academy conference that we normally organise twice a year. The conference is in December.

JS commented that the SU can help to promote this and asked for details.

explained they are doing well and have good procedures and funding for welcoming new students. Nothing to report.

explained they are trying to understand progress monitoring as there is lots of information. Reps have tried to be involved but each school has their own way. Trying to help with annual reviews and how the review panel works. Feeling optimistic.

JS explained he would like to be kept updated.

JK joined the meeting.

4. PRES Discussion

JS explained the PRES is an annual or biannual national survey that the University partakes in. Asked if there were issues with promotion.

replied that they sent gifts to postgrads to encourage them to fill in the survey but there is only one email with the specific link and it gets lost in emails. Suggested an event in a computer room.

HT commented that some schools do that for NSS.

JS asked if there is anything that stands out that you'd like to raise with the Students' Union.

commented that their progress and assessment went down 9%, but it's changing anyway.

commented that they did well for working space but 'I am actively encouraged to interact with other researchers across the university' was generally low.

JS commented that the DA is trying to do some more networking events to welcome people from other disciplines. Asked what else could be done.

commented that it seems as though we are all doing very different research, but there could be more opportunities for overlap than we realise.

explained that the DA provides money for organising a conference, if you want to put one on yourself, but providing a space and some funding for smaller scientific meetings would work. If the burden of organising such an event isn't that big then people will do it.

JS asked what the main barriers are.

replied that organising a conference would take a couple of months, and it would be good to have funding to organise a half day meeting on a smaller scale and more casual.

commented that it can seem too official.

JS explained that the SU ran a mini research conference with PhD students presenting their research in Y Plas. There was opportunity to ask questions and network, with food and drink.

replied they usually don't want to give up a day's work for a big official meeting. They run 'Astronomy on Tap' which is 2 public short talks on astronomy from PhD students or staff. It is held in a bar, so good to network. Could do something similar for PGR students.

asked if schools write a response to the PRES.

HT replied that they feed into the Annual Review and Enhancement process.

Action Point – HT to send out dashboards.

5. Progress Monitoring and Supervisors Discussion

JS explained that progress monitoring is a large issue and has been raised in several PGRR forums, It has brought into focus whether policies and procedures will improve this. Registry are rewriting PGR policies and the SU is having a meeting with them. Asked for opinions.

Action Point – JS to provide feedback from meeting with Registry.

commented that is wasn't clear what happens when the supervisor looks at it and that something should pop up when the deadline passes.

JS explained that there is one policy is for supervisors.

commented that it says that a supervisor is required to do it, but there are no deadlines and you only find out when the next meeting can't take place.

explained that in the first year, they had to submit everything through SIMS, but this year had to send to reviewers directly. On SIMS it says their supervisor hasn't done anything.

added that if your supervisor doesn't do anything then the next meeting never appears.

commented that it would be nice to have a summary of the main changes.

JS asked if there is a section on progress monitoring in school handbooks.

Yes and no, it is a webpage.

asked where the review of policies comes from.

JS replied that it is Registry and is not available publicly.

6. Q&A With Postgraduate College Deans

MK and EK are welcomed and introduced and explain they will do their best to cover PSE.

MK explained they have done a review of PGR monitoring 2 years ago and has now been approved but the format has been revised. Explained they are working on a proposal to automatically extend submission date after IOS. We now review them immediately rather than 2 years later.

EK explained they are making changes to extenuating circumstances, involving the evidence required and also creating a standardised length of time, similar to staff. However, there are issues with international students as they can only have 2 months off, due to VISAs.

MK added that things have become more standard since the Dean roles have been introduced.

JS asked about time out for mental health issues.

MK explained there are lots of applications for extensions for anxiety and depression. These require medical evidence and professional guidance on what is an appropriate length of time. It becomes troubling when there are multiple applications as the question arises whether we are contributing to this mental state. Working with Registry to create new process focussing on wellbeing.

asked how these cases are treated for staff.

EK replied that it is with sick leave.

MK added that staff must go through an assessment to ensure they are fit to return to work and would like to see something similar for return to PhD, as often the return is based on an academic's view of what the student would be able to complete in normal circumstances. Would like plan to be looked at by occupational therapist.

EK added that sometimes it is best for student to withdraw and submit thesis at a later date, there is a cost for this but the University will usually waive the payment.

MK commented that a number of cases regrettably have demonstrated that the reason for the

extension request may have to do with support in progress. Something hopefully reflected in policy. It is better for a student to submit a complaint in a timely manner, rather than applying for extension at the end.

asked where you would complain.

MK replied with the regular complaint procedure.

JS explained that an issue has been raised about financial implications of taking time out.

EK explained they know it is a problem and sometimes students won't go on IOS because of financial reasons. International students can only have 2 months throughout their 3 years because it invalidates their VISA. Stipend is only paid when you are a student, which you are not during the IOS. Extensions are also not funded, so at the end of PhD there would be no more stipend.

JS asked about hardship funds.

EK replied that you have to have absolutely no money to get this funding, not eligible with savings.

JS asked about PRES.

EK explained they want this to be every other year as if you started your PhD in January you fill in the same survey as someone who started several years ago, giving odd results. Also having a year off for PTES.

MK added that Russell group wants questions to be revised and that smaller schools tend to get better results than other schools. Suggested it could be easier to create a community in smaller schools.

JS added that PGR interaction has a poor result across the University.

EK explained research culture is always an issue, as it is difficult to define and can't rephrase questions due to national survey.

MK explained it depends whether students actually want to interact with other PGRs and if it is better to meet people from same discipline but other organisations. Need to define what would constitute an optimal research environment.

commented that research project is very focused and meeting with others takes a lot of time.

EK added that they want to encourage people to become more rounded academics. We view seminar programmes as research culture, bringing people together.

MK explained that PGRs are part of a long term rethinking of what the third cycle is about. The PhD hasn't changed much in a long time.

suggested people from research groups actively being encouraged to interact with other researchers.

MK asked about what would justify their time to go somewhere and meet people.

replied she would like to go to something low level in the evening but would not take a day off for something more formal.

MK explained that AHSS are working on putting all talks and research seminars onto a google calendar so anyone can sign up to them. AHSS scored low in the question about research ambience stimulating research.

EK commented that it would be better to have more PGR attendees and suggested different times and days of the week.

asked about the PSE dean.

EK replied that nobody has been found yet but they are looking.

joined the meeting and explained that she has created the Society for Women Graduates which is looking to provide support for women and female identifying researchers. Explained there are meetings on the first Thursday every month (5 - 6:30pm) and other events:
- October - first social,
- November – talk from Abbie Morgan from forensic services
- December - Women behind the lens exhibition
- February - tailored careers and employability event
- May - conference to showcase research of members

explained they are also in process of becoming affiliated to British Network of Women Graduates and memberships go live tomorrow afternoon on the SU website.

7. PGR Teaching Discussion

JS explained that he co-lead work done in spring which encompassed employment status and contracts etc and there had been a demand for a more formal relationship from PGRs. In May, the University drew up welcome potential options for employment for PGRs who teach. Also, UCU have submitted a request for employment status for PGRs who teach and this will be developed further. Will discuss the entitlements that PGRs may or may not desire from a new relationship with the University, asked for suggestions.

suggested better training and liked the sound of incremental pay as you become more experienced.

8. Any Other Business

Action Points
Page 3 – HT to send dashboards.
Page 3 – JS to provide feedback from meeting with Registry.