

Postgraduate Working Group Meeting Agenda

Tuesday 7th April 2020, Google Hangouts

Minutes (Taken by VP Equality and Citizenship, Megan Reilly):

Meeting opened by Sara Dowling, VP Postgrad Affairs (VPPGA)

Total in Attendance (Google Hangouts Call): **26**

Sara (VPPGA) opens the meeting with intro to all, suggesting that this meeting be different to others - more discussion based than just giving information. Some members had volunteered to contribute their issues before the meeting which were noted in the Agenda. Meeting agenda itself made up of these prior discussions with several MOs. VPPGA thanks the group for this input.

Individual MO Input:

QUBSU - Gift Sotonye:

- Addresses Issues with funding. Notes that private funders have been upfront but not so much the public ones. Notes the need for more caring responsibility and approach to PG's at this time. Is working on a proposal to the University to highlight the issues coming up from students on the ground.. Major issues faced in relation to unemployment and exam stress.
- Notes that it's a different case in the UK then to the Republic of Ireland, but things in the South seemed to be a little clearer to her.
- Extremely important to reiterate access to resources, which will be pushed.

NUIGSU - Cameron Keighron and Brandon Walsh:

- Notes that the Med tech Dept are playing a major role in the COVID-19 response
- No physical access to NUIG campus, bad wifi connections for journal access.
- Every VIVA and GRC has taken place already.
- Not always meeting the same learning outcomes. Is exploring how can this be rectified with projects and alternative assessments etc?
- Reiterates QUBSUs comments that different caring responsibilities are required for PG student body.
- Exploring greater engagement with SAF and more money put into it due to the need.
- A lot of people struggling without fieldwork/lab work
- Supervisors not putting too much pressure on students which is great.

Sara VPPGA: Important to remember those in one year MA taught or research courses who are under major pressure to complete in time - this is the one opportunity to do so, and often this group of students won't have a grade point average to rely on so far this year - also includes those who may have just begun their Postgrad journey in January and may have missed orientations or introductions (or be in very early stages of their study) of their course as a result of COVID-19.

Important that students are linked with Supervisors (or other alternative Institutional advisors) now more than ever. Shouldn't be that researchers have to chase their supervisors

in such a time of crisis, especially at the risk of falling behind because of poor contact returns.

Aonghus Hunter Mc Cabe: (Chair) Maynooth PhD Workers group

- Gives backdrop to the group and the groups agenda
- Explains working with MSU support, through Workshop meetings to organise a forum for PhD students and workers to voice concerns
- Launched a cross-departmental survey on student and worker experience, found that circumstances were worse than expected.
- Group were protesting the week of the closure due to University increasing PG fees and on campus fees.
- Notes issues such as: those teaching on campus are occasional and have to keep vying for permanent position during the regular academic year, and how will COVID-19 affect this? Online teaching has actually increased workload for those issuing demonstrative hours. Depts in MSU have said they will reimburse for drawing software needed for performing classes, but this is not sensitive to financial circumstances for those who need it urgently. Prep time enhanced through online class development not included in payroll.
- Uniform guideline? Need some standardised guideline to pay people a baseline.
- IFUT - represent most lecturers. Group are in talks with IFUT for support.

UCC - Catherine Dawson:

- UCC: Notes that tutoring staff still getting paid for what they're doing
- Survey results very bad. Catherine and Sara to link in with Aonghus on this for a further collaborative discussion.

IRC Sponsorship Award (from the Symposium)

- Sponsorship of €500, how could it be used? PGWG to decide this. Some ideas linked into agenda (above and discussed) to spark ideas.
- Notes: Must be allocated to researchers (was supposed to be given to researcher at Symposium). Could be a suggestion for a series of webinars (best to be awarded). Sessions that can help people, research into coping ('Coping with COVID'). Mental health research, activism in the time of a pandemic, the importance of student engagement in a crisis, student nurses 'Joining the Fore', etc.
- **Deadline:** Ideas to be given to Sara VPPGA by *Tues 20th April at 12pm*.

Reach out and engagement options

- Online clinics (linked example to NUIG) - small groups online can work well
- Info Q&A sessions - make sure to include PG points!
- PubHD - social event, engaging, unique and personal - and gives postgrads a way to present their work and research, include presentations, Bios and intros from experts/fellows.
- Postgrad officer support call - enhance networking and reach out.

Questions asked (TUD):

1. How do you incorporate other urgent PG issues when the hot topic now is COVID related?

Sara VPPGA answers:

All issues can be related to or echoed in line with COVID-19 concerns, to remember that the main issues are access to supports and resources, workers rights, funding and representation - these apply as much now to COVID as they always have in general. Keep pushing Institutions and highlighting concerns, if a temporary measure is brought in that is positively contributing to the PG experience, discuss ways of sustainably keeping it after COVID-19, and the need for it in the first place. Uses the Break the Barriers campaign as an example - this campaign directly related to Postgrads in terms of accessibility to educational supports and third level funding, but opened up platforms for many other relatable conversations. Stresses that now is the time to be as vocal as possible and have the PG voice heard when lobbying for change and emergency support - and the potential of this creating lasting change for the PG community (finally!).

Postgraduate Symposium 2020 (Due to take place March 19th)

Sara VPPGA Gives massive thanks to TUDSU for work on PG Symposium which was due to happen on the 19th March, and extended thanks to all in the group who would have been panel speakers, participants and attendees. So much work went into the event that would be great to host again in another way. Suggests an open stream public webinar or series of expert panels. Won't be the exact same as previously planned, but could be similar. Welcomes input from the whole group on any ideas or suggestions, and to be as creative as possible! - will be continuing this conversation in the days and weeks to come so stay posted. Deadline for ideas on this to be announced soon!

Items for information:

Sara VPPGA updates on the use of the Charter as a bargaining chip across tables at Institutional meetings so far, and credits the great work being done by independent groups across the country in the fight to implement these rights for postgrads in precarious positions. Notes the constructive discussions from the last campaign event, the USI/SIPTU Webinar, and intentions to make future online events more publicly accessible. Ongoing meetings about contracts and the terminology in them taking place between USI and SIPTU, and more developed research document on last years survey results is in preparation. Will keep the group updates on progress at the next WG meeting. Urges everyone to recommend the SIPTU helpline and ask for the Student Advocate Worker for all concerns.

Further MSU concerns relating to workers rights:

- Maynooth group made aware that Uni looking to outsource occasional cleaning staff
- Outsourcing of cleaning and catering staff etc, and Online teaching - temporary replacement but doesn't meet the need. Expects institutions will want to limit costs.

Sara VPPGA - **NB:** *Notes that in the middle of an immediate global pandemic, researchers and academics are needed more than ever before, with recruitments taking place all over

the world in medical and science related fields for new cures, vaccines, medical histories and discoveries, tracking and comparing previous epidemic rates, economic effects of a crisis, working class responsibilities etc etc - if needed when a crisis hits, it is critical that researchers feel valued and respected, and are treated so, all year round!*

VPAA Vice President for Academic Affairs, Kevin Mc Stravock:

No Detriment Policy update from Kevin - tries to mitigate against disadvantage

Notes however that it may not be relevant for researchers because of the nature of their work - Won't benefit these students to take a one size fits all approach. There should be partnership with students though to better develop this conversation and policies. Welcomes anyone to get in touch if they have any questions (education@usi.ie)

IT Carlow - Adam Clarke asks:

Notes that this policy looks at your GPA from year before and applies to current year; not applicable to masters taught and research. Notes also not much consistency across institutions, but notes that this has been a conversation already developed by the SU.

Kevin answers:

Making sure to engage in conversations and that the college picks up those issues IUA and THEA looking towards approach where exam boards are given additional discretionary power to look at students' progress, but agrees that it is difficult where there hasn't been a lot of assessment. Possibility of resit without financial or academic penalties.

AOB:

VPPGA Sara notes:

- Aware that this is not an easy time, if people need additional help please reach out, not to be overwhelmed as a Postgrad and trying to operate in the unknown alone, or as a Postgrad Rep being unsure what steps to take next. We are here to help.
- Notes Crossover documents that many MOs may be using this time to begin developing - : gives examples of great engagement used by some MO's in PG Matters this year, urges group to use this as inspiration - most importantly pass on ANY PG information MO's may have learned this year, and make sure it makes up a section of Crossover Manuals , documentation and training - only way to greater enhance PG understanding for years to come.

Finally, Sara VPPGA notes the Hugh Kearns research event that took place at TUD and the authentic response received when she spoke about time management; amidst this crisis, it is a great time to reach out and check in with postgrads who will really be seeking a sense of community - people can't say they don't have time anymore, so please utilise this!

Sara stresses the unity and support that the WG can provide, reiterates that USI are here to support through this time, and thanks everyone for their attendance.

No further questions.

MEETING END.