



Postgraduate Working Group

Location: MTU Kerry & Zoom

Date: 26th January 2023

Time: 14:15-15:15

Miontuairiscí/ Minutes

Present: -

Waqar Ahmed (Chair, USI), Beth O'Reilly (USI), Raimey O'Boyle (NUIGSU), Jamie-Lukas Campbell (QUBSU), Jessica Perez (TUDSU), Shahboz Babaev (TUSSU), Christine O'Mahony (DCUSU), Zoe Cummins (TCDSU), Niall Naughton (TUSSU), Saoirse Daly (TUDSU), Jenna Barry (TUS), Sneha Pala (MSU).

1. Minutes of Meeting: -

The minutes of meeting were taken and approved as read.

2. Matters Arising from Minutes:-

No matter arising from the minutes.

3. Items for Discussion

3.1 Campaigning USI Postgraduate Researchers' Rights Charter

- Waqar: desk research is still happening, and they have not reached out to stakeholders. Wants feedback on how we can move forward with campaigning on the charter
- Jamie: Thinks the charter is good and is looking to adapt some elements of it to fit to the Northern Perspective.
- Jessica: Needs to be very visible to postgraduate researchers – getting posters up in research hubs and further promotion on socials and with flyers. Campaigns with t-shirts work well but the funding might not exist to proceed with t-shirts.
- Waqar: 9th of February there is a potential planned walkout, and we need to look at how we can get postgraduates involved in a second walkout. Waqar will be working

on a social media campaign and will be sending the charter to other stakeholders while campaigning.

3.2 USI Stipend Survey of PGRs

- Helps to highlight the gaps in postgraduate stipends. The PGR (Postgraduate Research) Student Survey will also be taking place this year (PGR Student Survey takes place every two years).
- Waqar has taken some questions from the EuroDoc PGR survey and added new questions to the survey circulated last year.
- Waqar will be sharing a link to the first draft of the survey questions for feedback from the working group. Aims to roll out the survey soon as it will take time to collect and analyse the data. It includes questions on sources of income, amount spent on accommodation, working conditions, career paths. At the end of the survey there will be the option for PGs to sign the open letter with the charter.
- Jessica suggests that in the stipend area there should be a question on if students were warned on the current cost of living crisis ahead of beginning their research. Also requests a question on mental health and wellbeing.
- Niall: TUS has been battling regarding stipends for the past two years because of the inequality between the midlands and the Midwest. Were promised that a €500 deficit would be in action from December 1st, but this was not the case. Suggests a question on the payment schedule of the stipend because of the monthly arrears issue in TUS. Niall agrees with Jessica's point on the need for questions on mental health and wellbeing.
- Jessica suggests a question on if PGs feel comfortable going to their supervisor when they are struggling with their mental health
- Niall suggests a question on if the PGs are aware of financial aid (if any) that exists for postgraduate students in their institution
- Jamie notes that we must include notes on privacy and that confidentiality must be ensured as some PhDs feel they cannot be critical of their supervisors
- Waqar notes that the survey will be circulated on the USI website rather than a personal link

3.3 Motions related to PG affairs and role of VPPGA

- A motion passed last year mandating a review of the role of VPPGA – Waqar asks for thoughts on what the role should look like
- Jessica feels the role should be divided into a postgraduate taught and postgraduate researcher representation. Also suggests that the role of VP PGA be converted to a full-time role, which she acknowledges may put people off.
- Jenna suggests that three part-time roles would be best – research, taught and engagement officer. If there were full-time officers, she suggests that we have two full-time officers. Also suggests that the role be regionalised rather than being based in Dublin.
- Jenna feels we must look at what USI can afford to commit to the role before a full review is done.

- Jessica notes that the way in which the job is advertised is important in encouraging PhDs to run for the position.
- Jamie noted that unless you have been through the experience of a postgrad it is difficult to represent them, and would favour two roles as feels that it is quite an isolating role
- Raimey asked if people felt that it was separate research and taught?
- TUD thinks that it is a good idea to bring in a full-time role, but bringing the second role just for the purpose of someone not feeling isolated is not really justification to bring in two roles.
- Jenna notes that the USI has a whole team for undergraduates
- Christine notes that DCU tried to introduce this, but it did not reach quorum. Agrees that postgraduate taught and postgraduate research are incredibly different – and there will be fewer academic commitments for the postgraduate taught
- TCD are currently trying to integrate postgraduate representation under the TCDSU and worries that if a full-time role is brought in, due to funding implications there
- Jessica notes that the difference between PGR and PGT isn't *what* is learned, but the way it is learned. PGT is closer to the undergraduate experience.
- Jenna notes that a taught masters is more relevant to the undergraduate experience, but PGR is much more isolating. There are a whole host of postgraduate research issues
- Waqar informed that details discussion on this will be carried out later to prepare recommendations for Governance Committee.

4. Local Issues

- Jessica working with team to do a Postgraduate research rep system that coincides with the class rep system, was looking to see if anybody else had this system. Wanted a rep for those in different research hubs, a part-time rep, and a working from home rep.
- Zoe is currently doing a very similar thing and will touch base with Saoirse and Jessica on this
- Raimey suggested collaborating with postgrad societies. She has run collaborated events at UOG and they have been quite good, might help with the isolation as a temporary solution.
- Jenna said there is an industrial relations forum coming up in TUS and was told that she would be invited, asked if anyone had heard of a forum and when it was on
- Jamie notes that QUB have a similar system to what Jessica is looking at. Also looking for thoughts and suggestions around potential actions - shared email with the WG

VP PGA thanked everyone for their attendance and participation before closing the meeting. The next meeting is to be held in February before CN.
