



Postgraduate Working Group

Location: Online

Date: 30th March 2023

Time: 14:00-15:00

Miontuairiscí/ Minutes

Present: -

Waqar Ahmed (Chair, USI), Jamie-Lukas Campbell (QUBSU), Jessica Perez (TUDSU), Shahboz Babaev (TUSU), Jenna Barry (TUS), Stephen O'Riordan (UCCSU)

1. Minutes of Meeting: -

The minutes of meeting were deferred to the next meeting.

2. Matters Arising from Minutes:-

No matter arising from the minutes.

3. Items for Discussion

Membership and ToRs of the group

VPPGA said we need to rethink the role of the group in terms of membership, and TORs. Need to update the group membership and its criteria.

4. Local Issues

QUBSU informed that a review of PGR funding has been happening in the North. However, things are not looking promising regarding PGR funding for the near future. Work has also been done on EDI aspects. Outreach to some PGRs is also a challenge. Also, the data collection and tracking metrics are a challenge. QUBSU also discussed the discrepancies in support for undergraduates and postgraduates.

5. Items for Information / Pointí Eolais

PhD Stipend review update

VPPGA provided a brief on two meetings with PhD review co-chairs. The co-chairs appreciated the USI submission and the data and rationale provided. There were about 700 submissions from the PhDs, students' unions and other organisations which was appreciated. The review co-chairs may most likely submit an interim report at the end of April before the final report later. The co-chairs said that the consultation would be open. VPPGA will follow up with the co-chairs once the interim report is made available. On the funding and stipend point, the co-chairs seemed confident about proposing a benchmark or minimum national stipend. Regarding visa issues for non-EU PhDs, the review team is likely to come up with recommendations. Most of the changes in this realm do not need major changes in the law but changes in the Department of Justice practices. The employment status has been the most debated one and the co-chairs might suggest further inquiry/ consultation on this matter as there was no consensus among other stakeholders. Lack of data and transparency on data about PGR feedback, funding and resource also came up during the review. VPPGA was of the view that there is not much hope for an overall reform in the system at this moment and therefore we need to keep lobbying on our demands.

Working groups updates

VPPGA provided an update on the working groups. The survey from the postgraduate student engagement working group has been distributed to institutions. The feedback from the students' unions will be important to the survey. The terms of reference for the Postgraduate Career profiling and Career Tracking have been finalised with the data collection and consultation to be started in April. UCCSU said that they have been working on that tracking issue specifically this year in UCC. They have a new Research Administration project that's hopefully going to be able to capture this information. Currently, there are no figures available for how long on average it takes to complete a PhD for example.

Motions for Comhdháil

VPPGA informed that he has submitted five motions related to postgraduate affairs. These include (i) Postgraduate Engagement and Participation; (ii) Reforms for Non-EU Postgraduate Researchers; (iii) Postgraduate Researchers' Rights Charter; (iv) Open Access and subscription costs; (v) International Student Visa Waiver Scheme Within the Irish State. There are motions submitted on SUSI reforms and student assistance funds, and free fee initiatives for Postgraduates. VPPGA encouraged members to bring any emergency motions if any major issue has been overlooked.

USI Stipend Survey of PGRs

VPPGA informed that the survey questionnaire has been finalised, but the timing of data collection is appropriate in September, considering the PhD review and change in stipends in some institutions for the next academic year. JB stated that the survey is a massive undertaking. JB suggested that USI may consider working with other groups such as PWO to conduct such surveys so the workload could be managed by VPPGA. TUDSU stated that it should be ensured that such collaboration measure stipends as well as expense and other certain questions that are part of the USI survey. The survey should also be done after one year gap. We could also consider working with research groups to conduct the survey. UCCSU said that we should be also looking at how the changes in stipends affect the number of new PhD researchers. Jessica suggested that we can work with graduate schools to get the enrolment numbers to analyse. VPPGA said that we should be

looking at both sets of data; one coming from institutions and the other coming from postgraduates.

Recommendations for the role of VPPGA

The constitution review committee needs to look at the role. The discussion on this will happen in future meetings of the PGWG.

EURODOC WG

VPPGA informed that Eurodoc (European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers) is looking for candidates for 'Employment & Welfare Working Group' for 2023-2024. VPPGA asked the suggestions if anyone is interested in getting involved as a WG coordinator.

USI Website

VPPGA informed that update to the website section related to postgraduate affairs will be made.

National review of Postgraduate Taught masters

VPPGA stated that the challenges faced by taught master's students are not acknowledged and addressed on the national or institutional level. VPPGA will lobby the DFHERIS for a separate national review of the support available to postgraduate-taught students and their fees. QUBSU highlighted that similar issues also need to be addressed in the North.

Postgraduate Symposium

It was suggested that the postgraduate symposium is not mandated and there is a workload issue so the symposium will not be conducted. VPPGA said that some form of the event for postgraduates should be arranged in future. However, the format (e.g., Research presentation events, talk events, social events, team building day, mental health support session etc.) of the event could be discussed in future. QUBSU suggested providing the opportunity for postgrads to publish some of their research + an opportunity for a handful of students to present in a hybrid format. JB suggested maybe we could work with IUA on a postgraduate research event or training day on engaged research and society.

6. A.O.B

TUDSU invited members on the postgraduate week which includes the postgraduate Academic Writing Day, and Professional Development Day. The invite to a support session on postgraduate caregiving will also be shared.

JB showed concern about the HEA data on the attrition rate for postgraduates. TUDSU suggested that an institution-based collection approach might be useful to get such data. Jessica emphasised the effective utilization of board/ committee representation.

TUDSU said the VP campaign should be more at the forefront and collaborate on campaigns for postgraduates—especially those related to surveys and data collection. TUDSU asked if a motion on that could be brought up. VPPGA said he will be happy to contribute to any emergency motion.

JB informed the group about the application deadline for student engagement project funding. JB informed that PCAU and PGWA are officially going to merge under a new name, the Postgraduate Workers Organisation (PWO).

VPPGA informed the issue of the age gap on access to Contraception for postgraduates.

QUBSU and TUDSU thanked the chair for the support in North and Dublin. VPPGA stressed that USI needs to do more tangible work for postgraduates in the North. The stipend survey will be sent to PGRs in the North as well.

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