



Postgraduate Working Group Meeting #2 September 11th 2020

Online Call 1pm – 2pm.

Starts: 2:05 pm

1. Introduction

a. Present Today:

- i. Adam Clark, USI PG Officer
- ii. Kelsey Bruce, NUIG 1st year PhD (Minute taker)
- iii. Seb Bierema, NUIG PG Research Officer
- iv. Martin Smyth, NUIG PG Taught Officer
- v. Rachel Sarsfield Ryan, VP Edu IDTSU
- vi. Lucien Waugh Daly, DCU
- vii. Naomi Algeo, Student Associate Intern (Postgraduate Student Engagement) NStEP
- viii. Isabell Aust, DCU
- ix. Moya Browne, TUD SU
- x. Hamza Jamma, VP Education TUD SU
- xi. Fionn Collins, VP Welfare TUD SU

2. Minutes from previous meeting & questions.

- a. Adam has some comments that will be addressed later on.
- b. Isabell - we need more services for PG students. The Union only seems to serve undergrads. Right now they seem to offer free alcohol, condoms, movements when something big happens. Mostly, attention is given to issues that primarily affect undergrads and students right out of
- c. Seb – many PGs at NUIG feel the same way.
- d. Kelsey – it’s a cycle that PGs don’t come to the union because they don’t know what the union can offer and so don’t engage. Therefore, the union doesn’t know what to do for students.
- e. Lucien – the issue of “what can the union do for me” is pervasive across institutions.
- f. Rachael – the childcare subsidy plan could be improved. UGs are also unaware that PGs are the ones doing much of the teaching and grading.

- g. Isabelle – experience has been that students are aware that she is not a professor -> students therefor go over her head.
 - h. Lucien – we need to educate UGs better on the roles PGs play in their education.
 - i. Adam – Carl Burn is the education organizer in SIPTU, handles PhD student inquiries.
 - j. Seb – SIPTU is the union at NUIG that we work with. Carl has been difficult to work with in regards to PG Charter (felt that the demands
 - k. Isabelle – stipend works out to €6/hr when she could be making €40 as an educator in previous work.
3. Campus check-in & issues on campus.
- a. Seb – with help from SIPTU, a group of PGs at NUIG have been negotiating to ensure people are being paid for teaching. A little over a month ago, HR did a 180 and decided that teaching will not be paid. The formal channels are being closed so looking for ways to bring action about in regards to this. It seems like HR may be getting pressure from outside sources due to a lack of funds.
 - b. Adam – the European Charter and Code outlines ethical treatment for PG researchers. It states that those teaching should have reasonable conditions and be paid for their work. Adam is continuing to investigate this.
 - c. Seb – in the Netherlands, a PhD is treated as a job with full benefits.
 - d. Adam – in Ireland, PhDs tend to be seen more as students and less as workers. This is something we need to work (long term) to change.
 - e. Naomi – how is information handed over from year to year? Especially with short terms as officers compared to PG careers, how are things communicated?
 - f. General consensus is there is little to no handoff.
 - g. Isabelle – there is little support for mature people pursuing PhDs who have families. Especially for people with children, there needs to be more support.
 - h. Adam – we need to develop concrete targets and completing research to identify issues PGs are teaching.
 - i. Naomi – given the theme to increase PG student engagement. Still in development. Headed towards research perspective as taught masters students have very similar issues to undergrads. **Naomi would welcome input from students individually. Please reach out at: nsteppostgraduate@usi.ie**
4. SIPTU Charter campaign update. (VPPGA)
- a. Adam – one part of his remit this year is working with PhD researchers to improve demands, especially pay scales.
 - b. Seb – there is an existing bargained rate for €22/hr for tutors
 - c. Adam: Lorna Fitzpatrick (USI President) has been working with us. TUD researchers feel they are being ignored. We are putting a pause on the

charter until more input has been gathered. Currently, only NUIG has responded to requests to meet. **Other PG organizers, please reach out.**

- d. Isabelle – are there groups that exist already calling for money?
 - e. Seb – there seems to be a few groups working mostly independently.
 - f. Adam – wants to meet with these groups to collect them together and bring things to national attention, specifically Simon Harris.
 - g. Kelsey – it can be difficult because many sabbatical officers are undergraduates. They just aren't aware of the issues we face and the communication that needs to happen.
 - h. Naomi – NUIG has both taught and research PG officers. How does this work?
 - i. Seb – still learning the ropes. Will report back.
5. Postgraduate Symposium 2021 update. (VPPGA)
- a. Adam – we will have to do it in an online platform. Official date is March 11th, 2020. There is a lot of work to do still. Looking to have NStEP and SIPTU, IRC. If you are aware of anyone who would be interested in doing a talk – PG welfare, research, networking, etc – have them reach out to Adam. This is a chance to present research, but also just life in general as a PG student. Details to come.
6. Eurodoc update. (VPPGA)
- a. Adam – meeting with Eurodoc; discussions have not started yet but it is on the agenda. Waiting to get meeting with them. Pushing for recognition of dignity and respect for PG workers. Eurodoc is an EU PG researchers group. Ireland has 2 seats on this group. Directed Adam to the European Charter and Code.
7. A.O.B.
- a. Kelsey - Inclusion of PGs in the laptop schemes. During orientation, was told that PGs would not be prioritized for these schemes.
 - i. Adam – that is concerning as PGs are the ones leading the online sessions this year. Will feedback with Lorna to see what we can do.
 - b. Kelsey – stipend paperwork deadlines are early in the year. NUIG requires all paperwork to be submitted by the 7th of the month in which one wants to be paid. Of note, this year, our orientation was scheduled for September 7th and many people were unaware of this deadline, left in a lurch without support. For first year PhD students, this means they often can't get paid until the second month of their PhD which is a significant problem. Curious, is this an issue just at NUIG, or are other institutions dealing with this as well?
 - i. Adam – suggests Kelsey reaches out to admin for immediate fix.
 - c. Kelsey – noticing the overlap between international students and postgraduates, there is a massive fee we have to pay each year (€300) despite knowing we will be here for longer for PhDs. This, combined with low stipends, is a financial burden. Additionally, due in part to the Covid-19 crisis,

there is a significant backlog in appointments with IRP renewal (Seb adds the appointments are booked through January at this point.)

- i. Adam – will look into it and this so something that will likely be a campaign. We need to be mindful of the value international students bring.
- ii. Seb – students to teach sometimes have to get police vetting/background checks. NUIG will pay for Irish Garda vetting, but will not pay for police background checks for foreign agencies, despite the fact that those are required. So students, who are not being paid to teach, also have to pay in order to teach.
- iii. Adam – surprised Pikachu and anger, will look into this.

Officially closes meeting at 2:06 pm.