



Meeting **FACULTY RESEARCH STUDENTS' COMMITTEE**
Place **Wessex House 3.36**
Date and Time **10.15 – 12.15pm Friday 15th July 2016**

Present	Prof Sue Wonnacott Dr James Doughty Dr Jim Laird Dr Adrian Hill Dr Simon Lewis Dr Lorenzo Caggiano Ms Jodi Walsh Mr Adam Kearns	Chair Department of Biology and Biochemistry Department of Computer Science Department of Maths (from 12.30pm) Department of Chemistry Department of Pharmacy and Pharmacology PG Student representative Students' Union Postgraduate Officer
In attendance	Dr Andrew Johnson Mr Christopher Harrison Mr Simon Gane	Department of Chemistry (incoming DoS for 16-17) PG Administrator Graduate School Manager
Apologies	Dr Sergey Gordeev	Department of Physics

		Action
1101	WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS Sue Wonnacott (SW) asked attendees to introduce themselves as there were new members present.	
1102	MINUTES Minutes of the meeting held on 5 th May 2016 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.	
1103	MATTERS ARISING SW indicated that most of the matters arising would be covered as agenda items. 1088: Simon Gane (SG) said that Tim Stoneman would be invited to a meeting in the 2016-17 academic year.	
1104	CHAIR'S BUSINESS <u>Teaching training:</u> SW explained that she was preparing a table that summarises the training provided by each department for PGRs who teach or demonstrate. The table was not yet complete but she hoped to finish it soon and then seek feedback from committee members over the summer. She also said that she had spoken to Giles Martin (GM), who runs the central Teaching Introduction for Postgraduates who Teach course, about the issues with the current course. Lorenzo Caggiano (LC) said that he had attended a forum at the end of June where he met GM but had found him to be somewhat inflexible when it came to taking on board suggestions for improvements that could be made to the central course. LC outlined how P&P students were now going to be given the option to join the Chemistry	

	<p>training sessions, which are run by Fiona Dickinson and are accredited by the University, as an alternative to the central course. It was also suggested that B&B and Physics students may benefit from the Chemistry scheme, which prepares students for associate membership of the Institute of Higher Education. Adam Kearns (AK) confirmed that there were widespread concerns amongst students about the Teaching Introduction for Postgraduates who Teach course. Jodi Walsh (JW), who was registered at the University of Exeter when she did her training, told members about the ASPIRE course run by that institution, which also prepares students for associate membership of the Institute of Higher Education. SW wondered whether there was scope for subject-specific training across GW4.</p> <p><u>Doctoral College:</u> SW outlined what she knew about the current status of the Doctoral College project. She said that the initial focus was on addressing elements of the student experience (e.g. induction) and that there would be a PGR Induction Fair held on the afternoon of 2 November. AK said that there would also be an event for PGRs in October, led by the Pro VC for Research.</p> <p><u>10 West</u> SW provided an update on the situation with the top two floors of 10W, which are designated for PG students, and she emphasised the importance of making Science students aware that this space is available for their use (e.g. for writing up or for group meetings). LC said that he was already encouraging his students to view the space and make suggestions for how it might be used. AK described the current layout for the space and outlined what he knew about plans for it. JW felt that students didn't know where to go or what they are allowed to do with the space. James Doughty (JD) suggested that an invite should be sent to all PG students. Simon Lewis (SL) proposed that the Graduate School should put together an email to go out to all PG students in the faculty, explaining what space is available, what it is for and how it can be used.</p> <p><u>Associate Dean term</u> SW indicated that she had received a letter confirming that her current term as Associate Dean for Graduate Studies will be extended for an indeterminate period.</p> <p><u>GS Research Afternoon</u> SW informed the committee that the annual Graduate School Research Afternoon had taken place on 6 June and had been really successful. SW thanked Directors of Studies for their contributions as chairs and judges, and also highlighted Sophie Hill, who should be thanked for doing such a good job of organising the event.</p>	SG
1105	<p>PRES ACTION PLANS SW invited Directors of Study to provide an update on progress with their PRES Action Plans.</p> <p><u>Biology & Biochemistry</u> JD had completed the PRES Action Plan Response Template in advance of the meeting. SW suggested that he add follow-up actions for those tasks that have been completed. Before completing the template JD explained that he had met with students to discuss the action plan. He noted that there was some confusion over the terminology used in some questions (e.g. research ambience was interpreted by some as meaning University infrastructure), and students said that for induction they want a 'one-stop shop' web page, that they don't have to log into, which contains everything they would need to know.</p> <p><u>Pharmacy & Pharmacology</u> LC had completed the PRES Action Plan Response Template in advance of the meeting. He said that he had found the PGR SSLC meetings to be useful in generating discussion with students and gaining their input. LC wondered whether we could learn lessons from what we do with the NSS survey, and whether we could give presentations to students, before they complete the PRES, to explain the terminology. AK felt that briefing students was risky, but there was nothing wrong with ensuring that students are familiar with the language used in PRES, perhaps by producing "you said, we did" posters that use the same terminology as the survey. JW felt that the language should also be used in the PGR</p>	

	<p>handbook. JD suggested that the Graduate School could propose phrases that the handbook, or posters, need to address.</p> <p><u>Computer Science</u> Jim Laird (JL) indicated that he had started to complete the PRES Action Plan Response Template. He said that it was noticeable that the EngD students have a different experience to PhD students.</p> <p><u>Chemistry</u> Simon Lewis (SL) confirmed that he will work on the PRES Action Plan before he finishes his term as DoS. He will do this jointly with the incoming DoS, Andrew Johnson (AJ). AJ confirmed that he had spoken to Janet Scott about the differences between the MRes and PhD induction for Sustainable Chemical Technologies students.</p>	
1106	<p>GRADUATE SCHOOL UPDATE</p> <p><u>Alternative format thesis</u> SG explained that the alternative format for thesis submission had now been approved by Senate and that Graduate School Managers were being asked to advise on the best way to communicate this change to academics and students. In response to a question from AJ about the rules and how it was determined who had written a paper, SW emphasised that the guidance was clear and each paper would be accompanied by a commentary and a statement that must include the contribution of the student to the published / submitted work. SW also said that the rules that had been agreed were quite flexible and allowed for a combination of published and conventionally reported material and accommodated the fact that Science students, for example, are likely to decide the format of their thesis later in the PGR cycle than some other faculties/schools. JW felt that the option to submit an alternative format thesis was a great idea, but students would need guidance. JL confirmed that he had been told that anyone submitting their thesis after 1 August 2016 would be able to take advantage of this change.</p> <p><u>QA7 update</u> SG informed the committee that several minor changes to QA7, the code of practice for research degrees, were being discussed, including the option to have an independent chair for a student's final viva.</p> <p><u>Progress report completion rates</u> Christopher Harrison joined the meeting at this point. SW explained that this issue had been discussed at the last URSC meeting and the completion rates for Science were noted to be significantly lower than those for other faculties/schools. She explained that faculties were now being asked to feedback comments to Jonathan Knight on the process of reporting PGR student progress and to propose any ideas on how to improve the proportion of reports being completed. SG went through the data that were presented to URSC and the reports that he had circulated on completion of progress reports, candidature and confirmation before the meeting. The following comments were made:</p> <p>SAMIS: JD suggested adding outstanding reports within the department to the DoS' in-tray. All felt one follow up email from SAMIS was inadequate and more likely to mean old reports remain incomplete</p> <p>REPORTS: AJ said the timing of reports is not always useful, i.e. in the middle of the Easter holidays. It's easy to forget about them when the student returns. JW said the process was rigorous compared to Exeter (who use MyPGR). AJ suggested the report itself could be streamlined, particularly for students where there are no issues. i.e. Simple Yes/No tickbox and any other comments; others felt that the current format was not onerous.</p> <p>MONITORING: SW said Humanities produce fortnightly reports; all agreed a similar system in Science would be the best way forward. LC suggested a name and shame email from SW to the Academic, DoS and HoD for persistent offenders. JL suggested the focus should be on the student, i.e. tracking those where no reports or milestones are being recorded. AJ said it would be unfair to penalise the student by saying they could not pass</p>	

	<p>confirmation until progress reports were completed, particularly if the supervisor is at fault. Neither did he believe that any attempt to withhold an academic's ability to advertise for a student would be successful. He did however feel that it would be feasible to say that academics who do not complete their reports would not be eligible to access URSA or EPSRC DTP funds.</p> <p>CONCLUSIONS: Recognition that completion rates in Science needed to be improved and DoSs agreed to be more vigilant in pursuing this aspiration. To facilitate this there would be: Regular reports from the Graduate School (discussed at each FRSC in open and closed business). Email to persistent offenders, cc DoS & HoD. SW to take data to Faculty Executive to ensure HoDs are aware of issues. Suggestions for SAMIS amendments to be passed to Registry: emails over longer period, notifications in SAMIS in-tray (e.g. continuous alert for DoS) and streamlining of reports.</p> <p><u>FRSC dates for 2016-17</u> The dates for next year's meetings were noted.</p>	
1107	<p>PHD VIVA GUIDELINE DOCUMENT</p> <p>SW explained that she holds weekly meetings with the Dean and Susan Alston from the Graduate School to review the latest batch of examiners' report forms. She said that there had been a few instances where examiners' recommendations have been changed (e.g. from minor changes to more substantial, or from more substantial to revised thesis) and the Dean was keen to facilitate better preparation of these forms. To that end, this guidance document had been produced to help examiners making decisions about viva outcomes. SW asked for comments on the draft document from the members of the committee.</p> <p>JL said that he was uncomfortable with the fact that examiners decisions are being overturned without full Board of Studies approval, and changing a decision from more substantial to a revised thesis is effectively changing it from a pass to a fail. SW emphasised that a recommendation for a revised thesis is not a fail, it is a deferred decision, and she made clear that any change to a decision was only made after consultation with the examiners. She said that the problem with requiring full BoS approval for any change is that the committee only meets every 4-6 weeks, however the new Dean may want to do things differently. LC commented that from the student's perspective a revised thesis decision is seen as a fail and it is important to ensure that they understand the distinction between a fail and a deferred decision. JD suggested that it would be useful to include some guidelines on what you communicate to the student after the viva. SW agreed to add something to the document to cover this. AK said that it would be useful if a student was debriefed after the viva and given an explanation of the decision and what it means. JW asked whether the guidelines would be available for students to see. SG agreed that the Graduate School team could hand out copies of the guidelines when a student submits their thesis.</p>	<p>SW</p> <p>SG</p>
1108	<p>ANY OTHER BUSINESS</p> <p>There was no other business.</p>	