



PG Working Group Meeting 11/05/2020
4 - 5 pm

In attendance: Sara Dowling, Róisín O'Donovan, Rhiannon Kavanagh, Ciara Kealy, Adam Clarke, Cameron Keighron, Dajana Sinik, Gift Sotonye-Frank, Kevin McStravock, Pierre Yimbog, Victor O'Loughlin, John Devine, Nicole Parkinson Kelly.
Apologies: None.

Minutes: Taken by Marie Lyons [VPBMW], with kind thanks!

- Intro / check in

Sara welcomed the members and thanked everyone for joining.

- Trends noticed [VPPGA Sara]

Sara notes some concerns raised between herself and individual members of the group since the last meeting - common concerns are; Mental health and moral of postgrads during this time, lack of Institutional clarity over PG academic accommodations, and support for PG officers. This has structured today's meetings agenda.

COVID-19 Discussion concerns:

- Casework for PG Class reps/officers [Adam Clarke, IT Carlow]
 - IT Carlow, majority of PGs are working under the current circumstances fairly ok, the majority of the work is working with possible incoming PG students and answering queries.
 - NUIG, seeing a lot of issues with lack of information on passed deadlines with no responses from the University on PhD sponsorship information. Issues with start dates. Suggestion to highlight the issues to the University.
- COVID-19 Impact Report [GIFT Sotonye, QUBSU]
 - Queens have had a number of COVID-19 issues with some issues still pending. QUBSU rolled out a survey of PG students and got a good number of responses under 9 grounds and highlighted a number of different issues.

- Hault to data collection and use of laboratories and this is impacting on the ability to complete their survey and therefore impacting on the deadline of completion and the funding of the PG.
 - Will people move away from the research as a result of not being able to complete the research under the current circumstances and especially those in difficult/busy home situations.
 - Recommendations: issues with acting responsibilities - asked the University to increase the amount of information for PG on the changes to circumstances and standards for alternatives which has been provided for undergraduate students/taught PG students. This would reduce the anxiety this cohort are experiencing.
 - Provision for study extensions - no clear guidance from funding bodies. Although the University is a funding body and can provide pressure on funding bodies. Senior Mgt are aware they need to do more and the need to work with the SU, not leaving the supervisors with the burden of dealing with the issues.
 - Sara: agreed with the need for more University clarification and taking ownership.
 - Adam: commend the work of Gift and QUBSU.
 - When the document is finished possibly share with the team.
 - Cam: NUIG will have a separate stream of questions in the survey for PG taught and PG research students.
- Phased reintroduction of Postgrads - impact on facilities and services - Sept/Oct [Giselle Scanlon, TCD] - did not join the meeting.
 - Sara gave a brief update on the concerns around the lack of clarity on Postgrad phased reintroduction to Institutions - asked members to keep her updated as they hear of any information.
- *'Leave of Absence'* Policy drafting and other issues [Cameron Keighron, NUIG]
 - Some of the concerns were answered this morning in a meeting, but didn't alleviate concerns. Dean of Graduate Students does not want a blanket extension; all students will have to apply for an extension. No stipend support for those with an extension. This solution is only for 4th year PhD students and the remaining year 1-3 are being asked to sort the issues themselves.
 - Cam setting up a WG with students and developing a statement.
 - Dean wants to remove the pre-graduate committee and remove the feedback means for students.
 - Cam looking for guidance on this.
 - Dean is justifying this as creating a leave of absence policy would take too long to pass and therefore resorting to this approach.

Points for Information:

- TCD Survey [PJ Wall, TCD] - did not join the meeting.
- Minding your Mental health during COVID-19 [VP Welfare]
 - Issue implications for PG working alone in the current situation.
 - Roisin outlined the differences PG students face compared to UG students and the financial pressures are larger.

- USI has a section on mental health on the website, USI created a video with PICHE on mental health supports.
- Having a meeting with USI and PICHE next week to discuss PG issues and supporting PG mental health issues.
- Mini report coming from the meeting with USI welfare officers on drug misuse and consumption to follow.
- Ró suggested to target PG students with Mental Health material, especially into groups/societies.
- Ró asked for the members' thoughts on how the USI VP PG and VP Welfare could work together next year.
- USI created a specific video for PG Mental Health.
- Worth sharing external support too as PG often have more caring responsibilities.

- Postgraduate Workers Voice Webinar [VP BWM]

Marie outlined that USI will be holding a webinar on Postgraduate Workers Voice and speaking on the effects of COVID-19 on PG workers and giving PGs a voice. This is open to all students, PG reps, and PG workers.

Action: members of this group can participate in webinar and can contact Sara or Marie if they would like to become involved.

- IRC Research Video Presentation competition update [VPPGA]
 - Sara has been working to better the relationship between USI and IRC this year and managed to receive sponsorship for PG research award.
 - The research competition will involve researchers submitting a 3 minute video on their research and the importance of it and will be assessed on the presentation ability during the video.
 - **Action: circulate the information on this competition once it is shared on the PG and USI channels.**
 - Open to all researchers at all stages - anyone taking a PG in Ireland/in an Irish HEI.
 - A collection of up to 10/the best videos will be posted on the IRC and USI channels in the lead up to the award announcement.
 - It is in the final stages prior to the announcement and will be posted in the coming days.
- USI/SIPTU Postgrad Charter *Campaign Report* progress & call for Testimonials [VPPGA]
 - Sara is developing a more in depth understanding of research and going back to the raw data and will be creating a condensed version of the report and will be released prior to crossover.
 - Seeking some testimonies and feedback on the report.
- Postgraduate Symposium [VPPGA]
 - Sara suggested to not run a Symposium event in the intended/alternative online manner. There have been a number of different webinars and events that target PG and support them during this time and target more in depth understanding given the circumstances.
 - Cam suggested that it is the best decision given the current circumstances and agreed by a number of different members of the PG group.

- Pierre suggested that TUD would be happy to host the Symposium next year.
- Academic learning isolation [VPPGA]
 - Reaching out to PG Societies / networks / Committees
 - Communication issues between supervisors/ Grad Depts

Sara suggested to reach out to these groups when circulating information.

- Priority Motions to Congress [VPPGA]

Sara outlined the motions that were prioritised.

Questioning a motion going forward on extending the VP PGA to a full time role, Sara outlined that this is a Constitutional Amendment and will automatically be discussed.

- Crossover content [VPPGA]
- PG Group Bonding??

A member of the working group suggested having a bonding session between the group.

Action: Sara notes she is happy to help facilitate something, asked for suggestions to be sent to her.

- A.O.B
- TUD: Has there been any discussion on PG stipends still remaining to be paid.
 - NUIG: PG students here still getting stipends but won't get paid, in current plans, if they go over their allotted PhD time.
 - Sara notes to her knowledge this is being discussed on a HEI basis, but work is being done on the stipend piece for the USI pre-budget submission which is in line with the USI/SIPTU report findings on stipends.
 - The IRC have clear guidelines (Joint Funders Statement) and you can direct IRC funded students to their website. Very good example of good, structured and clear supportive guidelines.

CLOSE