



Postgraduate Working Group

Location: NCI Dublin & Zoom

Date: 3rd November 2022

Time: 15:00-16:00

Miontuairiscí/ Minutes

Attendance: -

Waqar Ahmed (USI), Jessica Perez (TUDSU), Seha Pala (MSU), Colette Murphy (DCUSU), Mubashar Saeed (DCUSU), Sai Gujulla (NUIGSU), Joe Mee (NUIGSU), Raimsey O'Boyle (NUIGSU), Megan Ryan (UL PSU), Fernandos Ongolly (Non-EEA PhD Students Society-Ireland), Vivin Viswanath (UL PSU), Louis Pemble (UL PSU)

1. Minutes of Meeting: -

The minutes of meeting were taken and approved as read.

2. Matters Arising from Minutes:-

- The Minister of DFHERIS was informed that there should be a larger representation of postgraduate researchers and groups at upcoming meetings.
- There was a discussion of the importance of addressing unequal funding issues at the local as well as national level within and between HEIs (Higher Education Institutions).
- Part-time postgraduate officers' participation at national council meetings was stressed at Coiste Gnó's meeting where VP PGA requested that the item be discussed in the President's working group to encourage part-time postgraduate officers to participate in national council and USI meetings.
- In response to Jessica Perez's inquiry, USI VP PGA informed that it is up to the PG officer to decide which meetings are relevant to them to attend at the National Council. It is up to the individual member organizations to cover the costs of attending the National Council.

3. Items for Discussion: -

3.1 USI Postgraduate Workers Rights Charter

- The background of the charter first developed with SIPTU (Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union) was provided by VP PGA. In 2021, a motion was passed to create a new charter more democratically in consultation with postgraduate researchers. VP PGA informed that the draft charter has been shared with PCAU (PhDs Collective Action Union), PGWAI, Non-EEA PhD Society, UL PSU, RCSISU, and other postgraduate rights groups. Members and non-members were given ample time to provide feedback and consultation. USI VP PGA encouraged everyone to provide feedback, suggestions, and comments on the USI charter document. VP PGA stressed the importance of the charter, as it will also be submitted for the upcoming national PhD review. It is important to move forward on the postgraduate rights campaign with unity in demand.
- A summary of the charter draft was presented by the VP PGA, which included (1) Employee Status for all Postgraduate Researchers; (2) Minimum Living Wage; (3) Recognition and Payment of Work; (4) Support for Teaching and Work ; (5) Access to Suitable Work Environment and Resources; (6) Appropriate Supervision; (7) Appeal and Grievances Procedures; (8) Affordable Accommodation; (9) PGR (Postgraduate Research) Representation in Decision Making Bodies; (10) Right to be Represented by Students, Teaching and Trade Union; (11) Non-Discrimination; (12) Rights of Non-EEA Postgraduate Researchers; (13) Career Development Pathways; (14) Equality of Opportunities ; (15) Standardization of Postgraduate Fees; (16) Open Access; (17) Accessibility for PGRs (Postgraduate Research) with disability.
- In response to Jessica Perez's question about the apprenticeship model, VP PGA clarified that USI is demanding worker rights and employment status for PGRs.
- Jessica Perez asked if maternity leave would be included in the charter. VP PGA responded that parental leave is included in the charter.
- VP PGA also confirmed that the charter will include funds for research travel to international conferences, in answer to Jessica Perez's question.
- Colette Murphy suggested creating social media graphics for the charter to ask postgraduate students for feedback. The Vice President of PGA said graphics would be created and shared with PGWAI and postgraduate students for highlighting key points of the draft charter.
- Colette Murphy asked about the timeframe for the consultation period and when the charter would be ready. According to the Vice President of the PGA, the consultation will continue for two more weeks, and then the charter will be presented as a motion at the December National Council meeting. TUDSU's Jessica Perez said that a monthly postgraduate seminar will be held at the end of the third week of November, where the charter will be presented. The group agreed to extend the consultation deadline until November 21st.

3.2 National review of State supports for PhD researchers

- The VP PGA reported that he met with the Minister of DFHERIS and the National Framework for Doctoral Education Advisory Group in October. Several issues related to the postgraduate stipend and conditions were discussed during both meetings. Moreover, the need to reform and review the system was emphasized. An exercise to map PhD support will be announced soon, the VP PGA has been promised by DFHERIS.

While the VP PGA informed that the review has been announced, USI has yet to be contacted about it. Once the charter and demands of USI are ready to be submitted, VP PGA plans to reach out to DFHERIS for further consultation with USI, postgraduate representatives, and other postgraduate rights groups.

- Fernandos Ongolly said that it will be beneficial to mobilize all the groups before the review. Different groups need to work together on these issues and campaign for similar demands. In this way, all the issues would be addressed instead of just a few.
- Jessica Perez emphasized the need for representation from all HEIs and from various regions. VP PGA informed that they met with PGWAI (Postgraduate Workers Alliance of Ireland) and SIPTU to collaborate on a unified charter. There may be differences in language in our charter, but it is imperative that we agree on the same demands. Despite several emails, there was no response from PCAU and PGWAI. To follow up with these groups, the VP PGA will reach out again.

3.3 Non-EU and International Postgraduate Students

- Fernandos Ongolly from Non-EEA PhD Students Society-Ireland informed that they are working on two petitions. Most non-EU family unification issues can be resolved if PhD researchers are recognized as workers. A lot of PhD researchers are married or in civil partnership, so they need to bring their spouses and dependents as well. Even the highest stipend of 18500 is not sustainable in these cases. Many spouses of PhD researchers are highly skilled and working in their non-EU home countries, but they are not permitted to work part-time or full-time in Ireland. As a result, recruitment, and retention of research talent in Ireland are highly challenging. An 18,500 stipend is not enough for a single person in Dublin, how could a family survive on that stipend without spouse working rights? Since early 2021, the Non-EEA PhD Students Society-Ireland has filed a petition to push the government to provide support for non-EEA PhD students' spouses in getting employment in Ireland. Non-EEA PhD researchers who receive Marie-Curie PhD scholarships are recognized as employees with hosting agreements, while those who receive government or Irish HEI (Higher Education Institutions) scholarships do not have the same rights. Despite being in Dáil, the petition has not been discussed.
- In addition, the non-EEA PhD society is working on a hosting agreement scheme petition. Researchers Assistants with lower qualifications than PhDs are given hosting agreements. It is not the case for PhD researchers, who cannot access the job market without a work permit under the Hosting Agreement Scheme. There are more than 650 signatures on the petition on Uplift, but it has not been submitted to the Dáil.
- Louis Pemble spoke about the importance of employee status for postgraduate researchers and working rights for their spouse, which could contribute to reducing the labor and skill shortage in Ireland. Furthermore, Fernandos Ongolly emphasized the shortage of skills in the market. PhD researchers' spouses are highly skilled, but untapped talent. When the spouse cannot work and PhD research is not recognized for naturalization, what prevents PhD researchers from taking up post-doctoral or other positions outside Ireland where you have more funds and benefits? Consequently, the public exchequer wastes money due to a lack of talent retention policies.
- Jessica Perez highlighted the situation of Irish postgraduate researchers with kids who are struggling to make ends meet because of their low stipends. The stipend would still not

be sufficient for PhD researchers with kids and dependents, so we can ask for financial support for the child fund. It is worthwhile to explore these options since employee status puts postgraduate researchers in the tax net where they can also access benefits.

- The VP PGA thanked Fernandos Ongolly for drawing attention to the gaps and inequalities in the current system.

4. Local Issues:-

- Joe Mee informed the contract changes for UOG PhDs who are assigned teaching and related duties. According to the new conditions, PhDs will be paid half the rate of lectures as compared to the previous rate. Now, they will only be paid tutorial rates. The payment of preparation and marking assignments was also discussed. The institutional response to this issue is negative. UOGSU is seeking legal advice in this matter. VP PGA stated that the issue will be brought up at the next Research and Graduate Education Committee (RGE). A good principles document for teaching-related duties for PGRs was being drafted by the IUA (Irish Universities Association), but it has yet to be approved.
- Vivin Viswanath raised the issue of health insurance for PGRs at UL. Any non-EU PGR staying longer than 12 months must pay 500-600 euros for health insurance after the court order. The VP PGA informed that this issue was discussed with the Minister of DFHERIS. In addition, the PGR charter calls for affordable health insurance.
- Jessica Perez invited postgraduates and other SUs (Students Unions) in Dublin to join the monthly hikes organized by TUDSU and DCUSU. In response, VP PGA informed that he would pass the invitation on to USI VP for Dublin Region for notification of all MOs (Member Organizations) in Dublin.

5. Items for Information / Pointí Eolais:-

5.1 USI Stipend Survey of PGRs

Every year in the second semester, the USI Stipend Survey of PGRs is conducted to identify funding gaps in various HEIs. The potential timeline and questionnaire template need to be discussed at the upcoming meetings. A copy of the previous survey will also be shared with the group.

5.2 PGSE WG

Mapping questions were sent to HEIs, but there was a low response rate. There will be a new template developed.

6. A.O.B:-

An organized conference on the definition of a PhD was suggested by Fernandos Ongolly. There is a possibility of inviting politicians, postgraduate researchers, and postgraduate rights organizations to discuss the definition, role, and conditions of PhDs in Ireland. VP PGA informed that USI conducts a postgraduate symposium or conference every year. We may discuss the details in upcoming meetings.

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