Postgraduate Researchers (PGRs) who Teach Forum
Friday 4 December 2020, 2.30-4.00pm
Microsoft Teams Meeting

In attendance:
Abi Whitefield, Postgraduate Academic Convenor, Chair - AW
Monique Mackenzie, Assistant Vice-Principal (Provost) - MM
Clare Peddie, Vice-Principal Education (Proctor) - CP
Frank Müller, Dean of Arts and Divinity - FM
Sibylle Scheipers, PGR Pro Dean - SS
Mairi Stewart, Director of Human Resources - MS
Heather McKiggan-Fee, Educational and PGR Developer - HMF
Emily Feamster, Academic Policy Officer (PGR)
Amy Gallacher, Director of Education
15 PGR representatives
Bethan Roberts, Administrative Officer for St Leonard's Postgraduate College, Clerk

1. Greeting and introduction
AW welcomed everyone with MM introducing the meeting, explaining that, due to the volume of matters arising for PGRs who teach, it was best to create this dedicated session separate from the PGR Executive Forum.

2. Previously submitted questions
PGRs were given the opportunity to raise questions for discussion before the meeting.
a. What will the university do to actively tackle casualisation of teaching and support the campaign for PGRs to be recognised as staff?
For context, the University and College Union is campaigning for PGRs to be recognised as members of staff, arguing that classifying PGRs as students means that they are not entitled to employee conditions which can impact mortgage applications and childcare among other things.
MS highlighted that a Flexible Working Group had been established to look at this cohort and the work undertaken to ensure consistency in practice, retention of flexibility and appropriate contractual arrangement were available.
SS asked if PGRs who teach would like to be considered as students and staff or just as staff. Student status lends benefits to PGRs, including access to the Discretionary Fund and Student Services. It was agreed between representatives that PGRs who teach would like to be considered as both students and staff but with a clearer delineation between these roles. They would like recognition for their teaching work as staff.
MS confirmed that in relation to the position on furlough, individual involved in teaching, even salaried employees, were not, entitled to be furloughed. This was a stipulation in the national furlough scheme rules and not a local university decision. With regard to sick pay, Statutory Sick Pay was part of the Flexible Worker Agreement but noted the rules surrounding a claim were restrictive.

MS confirmed that it was essential that all Tier 4 visa holders adhere to the 20 hour working limit stipulated on their visa. Failure to do may result in them being reported to UKVI and impacting the sponsorship license of the University. Any PGR experiencing difficulty in this area, should raise this via AW in the first instance.

MM explained that government-funded childcare doesn’t appear to be dependent on employment. Funded Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) is available to all three and four year olds and eligible two year olds in Scotland up to a total of 1140 hours since August 2020 (600 before this). MM requested that anyone with experience to the contrary should get in touch with her directly so she could follow this up.

AW suggested that there are mortgage providers that will consider PGRs and to contact her if any PGR needs advice on the matter.

**Action:** AW to request feedback from PGRs on the issues raised and report back to MM or MS as appropriate.

b. **Why are PGRs not paid for training undertaken that is mandatory for them to fulfil this role?**

It was decided before the meeting that PGRs shall now be paid for the time they spend in mandatory training run by CEED. There was some discussion around how much pay should be awarded for the now online self-directed study and if backpay would be considered for those who had previously taken the training before beginning teaching.

It was discussed that the point ‘it is possible to be exempted from doing the mandatory Moodle course if PGRs have already done a similar course elsewhere’ should be explicitly highlighted when PGRs are invited to teach.

**Action:** MM to consult with Human Resources about the payments and potential backpay and MS to communicate decisions to PGRs who teach regarding pay and backpay for mandatory training.

**Action:** HMF to update communication around mandatory training provided by CEED to mention that PGRs may be exempt from the training if they have already completed a similar course elsewhere.

c. **Why are PG tutors not able to receive student feedback via MMS surveys at end of semester?**

FM is canvassing Schools to gather if there is any objection to MMS survey data being shared to PGRs who teach, but there are no reasons to withhold feedback. Safeguards will be put in place to ensure feedback is provided on a need-to-know basis and is demonstrator-specific. Feedback will be distributed via Directors of Teaching within Schools.

**Action:** FM to contact DoTs to ensure appropriate feedback is shared to PGRs who teach following MMS surveys.
d. What communication strategies will the University adopt going forward to maintain a relationship with PGRs who teach?

The Proctor’s Office has collated a mailing list of all PGRs who teach across Schools. There is no HR system in place which can easily and automatically provide this list, so it relies on updates from Schools. Schools are encouraged to update their own mailing lists to include PGRs who teach to ensure no School-specific update is missed.

MM will continue to communicate monthly to all PGRs (including updates specifically for PGRs who teach), but a separate forum for PGRs who teach will now also be hosted each semester for issues to be raised, similar to the communication plan currently in place for all PGRs.

There will now be an HR Business Partner in place for PGRs who teach to contact regarding HR or contractual issues, the email is mls10@st-andrews.ac.uk.

Action: CP and MS will explore how to best keep the PGRs who teach mailing list up to date.

Action: The Provost’s Office will organise with AW a PGRs who Teach Forum for the end of the Candlemas semester 2020/2021.

e. My School - Modern Languages - has last year accepted a PGR request in the SSCC meeting to have a fortnightly office hour for PGRs and part-time staff. Could University policy encourage my School to move towards 1 office hour per week for PGRs who teach for it to be in line with every other School I know of?

CP stated that it would make little sense to implement a policy on office hours when at the School and even discipline level there are unique requirements. FM stressed that PGRs who teach should have similar office hour availability to academics within Schools to standardise student experience.

f. What is the justification behind some Schools - like IR and History - paying 3 hours of prep work, as opposed to most Schools which pay 1 hour?

FM explained the University policy that, as standard, 3 hours of preparatory work would be paid when two or more of the following conditions apply:

- the Tutor is asked to engage substantively with material with which they are not expected to be familiar;
- the guidance that can be provided for the tutorial work is limited;
- the Tutor is undertaking their first tutorial work for that module.

Otherwise, 1 hour of preparatory work will be paid.

g. How will the university ensure that PGR students who would normally teach don’t miss out on income because they feel they’re at risk or don’t want to put vulnerable people they care for at risk?

CP reassured everyone that transmission of COVID-19 is not evident in the setting of the Higher Education classroom and full risk assessments have been carried out for in-person teaching with necessary requirements as set out by the Scottish Government in place. If a PGR who teaches still feels that due to their personal circumstances they would prefer to teach virtually, then they should contact Occupational Health or their
Head of School. It was emphasised that students do want in-person teaching and to protect their wellbeing and mental health it should be offered.

There was some discussion as to whether the precautions taken had been communicated to PGRs who teach. CP had communicated to staff by multiple channels, including the weekly newsletter In the Loop, although not specifically to PGRs who teach.

3. Agenda points (that were not covered above)
   a. Concerns about dual-mode delivery, technology and pedagogy, and lack of training

   Not a specific issue to PGRs who teach, FM reassured the representatives that technical equipment and teaching is continuously improved through feedback from those who teach.
   
   HMF is developing more training opportunities through CEED for the Candlemas semester 2020/2021. This includes a session where academics share their own experiences with dual-mode delivery.

   b. Why is there a difference between COVID and non-COVID sick pay?

   MS explained that Statutory Sick Pay requires you to earn an average of at least £120 per week and have been ill for at least 4 days in a row, which are conditions often not met by flexible workers, including PGRs who teach. Sympathetic to the current situation, the University offers COVID sick pay so that flexible workers can be paid regardless of if they meet the above conditions.

4. AOB
   a. Brexit and international PGRs who teach

   PGRs who are concerned about their status should contact brexit@st-andrews.ac.uk or Academic Registry through visas@st-andrews.ac.uk. It was highlighted that PGRs entering the country after the 31 December 2020 will need proof of their student status and residency in the UK (e.g. utility bill). CP reassured representatives that contracts will remain unchanged.

   b. Lecture experience

   It was agreed that a guest lecture opportunity was an important component of the PGR experience, as is seen at other universities. MM described the work in progress that is going into developing a PG Cert in order to professionalise teaching experience for PGRs.

   c. PGR representation

   The use of the Students’ Association (SA) to gather feedback from or communicate with PGRs who teach was raised as an issue. Representatives present believe that the practise creates a disconnect from staff by affirming that matters raised by PGRs who
teach about teaching is a student issue. It was asked that PGRs who teach could be disentangled from the SA and treated as staff.

HMF mentioned that, as is University policy, each PGR who teaches should have a designated mentor. The mentor should actively seek feedback as PGRs often have greater insight into student response to teaching material.

**Action:** MM to meet with the PGR representative who raised the matter to discuss options of PGR representation for those who teach that is separate from the SA.

d. **Education updates**

It was discussed that there might be a gap in the sharing of updates from Schools to students.

The Proctor’s Office updates the Education Blog regularly although it is currently on SharePoint which may not be accessible to PGRs. There was no objection to changing this.

**Action:** CP/EF to ensure PGRs who teach have access to the Education Blog.

e. **Virtual teaching spaces**

There was concern over teaching from home or the library due to lack of a quiet environment or internet speed. Bookable space in the Medicine building has been allocated specifically for staff and PGRs to teach from since the beginning of the Martinmas semester 2020/2021.

Bethan Roberts
Administrative Officer for St Leonard’s Postgraduate College