

minutes

Meeting:	Postgraduate Assembly
Date:	26 th March 2019
Paper:	Postgraduate Assembly Spring 19 – 2 (PGAS435)
Author:	Alexandros Efstratiou
Purpose:	Record of Decision Making

Minutes of the Postgraduate Assembly 26th March 2019

Assembly members present: Matthew Gallagher (PPL), Ruth Flaherty (LAW), James McLean (AMA), Sophie Bagge (PSY), Charlotte Hallahan (LDC), Kameliya Foteva (ECO), Rob Klim (DEV)

Chair: Andrea James (AMA)

Apologies: Anush Rajagopal (LAW)

Absences: Martin Marko (Postgraduate Education Officer)

In attendance: Josh Melling (Postgraduate Engagement Coordinator), Alexandros Efstratiou (Advocacy Assistant)

PGAA435 Statements from the Chair

- AJ states that they are stepping in as chair in AR's absence.
- They encourage attendees to raise any issues that they would like.

PGAA436 Easter Programme of Events

- AJ goes over the Easter programme of events to raise awareness about the various activities available to postgraduate students over the break.
- JM explains that the reason some unstaffed events were incorporated into the programme was because of a lower budget this year.

PGAA437 Student Sport & Physical Activity Committee actions

- AJ explains that the Activities and Opportunities Officer is currently working towards securing better sports opportunities for postgraduate students, and asks for the assembly's steer on what they would like these opportunities to look like.
- RF asks what the turnout has been for the PGR running groups. JM states that it has been good, but this is with reference to UEASport provisions rather than pg(su) ones.
- MG states that they have noticed postgraduate students generally want low-commitment sport. Following a question, JM explains that PG football has been very successful, however there are not enough resources to hold these sessions very frequently.
- AJ states that this discussion will be incorporated into the sport provision research that the students' union has been doing. JM encourages the assembly to give as many insights as they can.
- AJ adds that people can provide their views through other forms, such as e-mail, as well.
- Following a question by RK, RF clarifies that postgraduate students don't uptake opportunities currently provided by UEASport because the times of these sessions do not fit their schedules, and postgraduates generally feel uncomfortable mixing with people who are younger than their own age group.

PGAA438 Discussion on the Economist magazine

- AJ explains that some of last year's leftover budget was spent on magazine subscriptions for Scholars, one of which was the Economist magazine.
- AJ further explains the situation around a controversial tweet by the Economist which distressed a part of the trans community. They explain that a student contacted them requesting that the magazine be removed from Scholars.
- JM clarifies that the subscription to the magazine has now expired either way, and the discussion is on whether the

magazines that have already been purchased should be removed from display.

-RF and RK support removing the Economist from Scholars, stating that students could explore other avenues for their research.

-KF states that the Economist is a prestigious magazine and should not be reduced to a single tweet that was taken out of context.

-MG acknowledges KF's point, but replies that, if the magazine is making even a few postgraduate students uncomfortable, then ignoring these students' requests would send the wrong messages.

-There is a discussion around the purpose of Scholars bar as a space. RK states that Scholars is a space for relaxation, not research. RF replies that Scholars can be a place for research for some people.

-There are some suggestions around allowing people to take the issues of the Economist permanently and removing them in that way, rather than throwing them away.

-JML states that, given the already problematic engagement of postgraduate students, it would be unwise to ignore this student's request.

-SB states that magazines such as the Economist have a responsibility to take care in how they report their news, and their tweet was irresponsible on that front. They support that the Economist should be removed as it has made some students uncomfortable.

-KF suggests taking more lenient action in order to satisfy both the portion of students who were offended, as well as the people who make use of the Economist. This action could be in the form of removing a single issue of the magazine, rather than removing it altogether.

-MG states that a single issue cannot be removed, since the issue in question was never displayed in Scholars in the first place.

-RF suggests putting the Economist issues behind the bar so they are not in wide display, which would remove the discomfort of people who are offended by it, while also catering to people who would like to make use of the Economist.

-KF states that this could have negative connotations, since having to ask for the Economist from the bar would imply that the students who want to read it are doing something wrong.

-AJ initiates a vote on whether people would like the Economist put behind the bar. The meeting is not quorate, therefore the vote is indicative:

FOR: 6

AGAINST: 0

ABSTAIN: 1

The assembly indicates favour towards putting the Economist issues behind the bar.

PGAA439 Associate Tutors at UEA

- JM gives some context on the ongoing research around ATs, specifically on working conditions and contracts. They specify that a lot of benchmarking is going on and there is quite a lot of contact with UCU and PGR students.
- AJ demonstrates, by show of hands, that the majority of people in the room are ATs.
- RF states that their marking is on a separate contract.
- JML explains that another huge problem is the discrepancy between faculties. For example, some ATs are paid for supervising duties, whereas others are not.
- RF and JM raise the issue that many of UEA's policies on ATs are not adhered to, for example around fair recruitment.
- AJ reads an e-mail that was sent to them with regards to this agenda item, from a PGR student who could not attend the assembly (full e-mail in the appendix).
- RF raises an issue around having modules solely for new ATs, and how that may affect the quality of teaching for students being taught on that module.
- JML states that there is a big issue around the differing requirements and expectations of ATs across different schools.
- RF adds that they appreciate the point around academics working to contract, however they state that some academics work beyond contracted hours because they too may be on precarious contracts, for example when doing post-doc work.
- AJ states that this conversation came up in a UCU meeting, and that precarious contracts may be putting undue strains on academics for a good chunk of their initial careers. JM states that for this reason, the SU is working with UCU to resolve this problem.
- SB states that, in their school, most of the unpaid work they do is around supporting students and addressing some of their mental health issues. They go on to explain that, if they stop doing their unpaid work, the only people who will adversely be affected are the students themselves, since academic staff would not pick such tasks up. In addition, they explain that they are not a person that can easily say no, and it would cause them a lot of stress if they had to refuse helping a student that sought help from them. They conclude by stating that their school would collapse if it weren't for the unpaid work that ATs are doing.
- Following a discussion, SB states that the biggest problem is the lack of acknowledgement and the lack of recognition for the work that ATs do.
- JML states that they would be happy to have the hourly teaching pay rate slightly reduced if it meant that UEA paid ATs for all the hours for which they work.
- SB explains that their school attempted to incorporate unpaid AT duties into PGR contracts, however this did not work. They add that, at other universities, this works because it is compensated by higher overall stipends.

-SB introduces the work they have been doing on ATs as part of the Courage Project. They explain that they want to implement actions quickly to improve the situation and they want to deliver an exemplar school where people can have full support as ATs. They also explain that they would like to do 2-hour paid sessions where people share best practice suggestions, and pilot that over 3 months. They invite people to talk to them and share their school-specific experiences.

SB can be contacted at s.bagge@uea.ac.uk.

-RF raises the practical point that their experience with finance so far has not been very good, especially since they have been moved away from central campus. They state that information regarding finance is very difficult to find, and finance-related problems are, because of this, hard to resolve when they occur.

-SB states that this type of information is very useful for them to put things into context with regards to their project.

-AJ further states that nobody from finance offers any explanation as to why fees increase year by year.

-RF adds that fee information in general is difficult to find, and they again raise the point that the situation is made harder following the finance office's relocation.

PGAA440 Any Other Business

-RF requests that MM not attending the assembly meeting be minuted.

-JML states that this is an interesting development, since MM was specifically called out for not attending enough assembly meetings.

-MG requests a justification of why MM did not attend the assembly meeting.

Time, date and place of next meeting

5:30pm, Friday 3rd May, Bookable Rooms 7 & 8

Appendix

E-mail from a PGR student

I am sorry for the short notice, but I heard you are discussing the SU's stance on AT rights tonight at PG Assembly and I wanted to send a message your way.

Idk how this normally goes, but I think (if it isn't already the case) that the SU should make fighting for AT rights a formal policy that they commit to. JML and I were in an AT meeting today (ran by AMA's [name removed]) and there is a general consensus that ATs are hugely exploited, particularly with regards to unpaid labour. My opinion is that the SU should:

- 1) Push for the UEA to hire it's casualised ATs on more permanent fractional contracts, while ringfencing some modules as being specifically for new ATs (PhDs wanting experience) only.
- 2) Failing this, at the very least, they should increase the amount of hours ATs are contracted to more accurately reflect the hours ATs work. In AMA it is common practice to allocate only one hour of pay per week to the slot for lecture attendance/office hours, then somehow expect ATs to do both, essentially meaning at least 12 hours unpaid labour over the semester. The amount of time given for marking is also inaccurate - one AT in the meeting I had today said they spent their entire allocation marking just the mid-module assessment, meaning their marking of the end of module assessment (the longer essay) was done for free. One AT revealed they had previously been given advice by a module organiser to just dedicate less time to helping students receiving lower grades in order to avoid unpaid labour.
- 3) The SU should push for UEA academics to commit to ONLY working to contract - I believe this is ASoS? Casualisation of AT contracts forces extra labour onto salaried academic staff; but also casualised work is propped up by academics who take on extra tasks unpaid. It should be SU policy to push for academics to only do as much as they're contracted for to avoid fuelling exploitative academic practices further.
- 4) AT hiring practices and responsibilities are still not unified across the UEA. LDC, AMA, CMP all have different rules on what is expected of an AT, or even what they are paid to do. For example, I have a friend in CMP who runs seminars, but is paid at the hourly rate of an assistant rather than as a seminar leader. I have heard this is common in CMP. Also, [name removed] mentioned today that LDC may be considering paying ATs for lecture attendance in addition to office hours, but there

has been pushback from the AMA head of school about this issue in our school.

I'm sure there is more stuff, but these are my thoughts at the moment. Once again, apologies for the late notice.