

Meeting:	Postgraduate Committee
Date:	27 <sup>th</sup> November 2019
Paper:	Postgraduate Assembly Autumn
Author:	Scott Arthur
Purpose:	Record of Decision Making

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## **Minutes of the Postgraduate Assembly 27<sup>th</sup> November 2019**

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### **Assembly Members Present:**

**Chair: Javier Martinez Perez**

**In Attendance:** Josh Melling (Student Engagement Coordinator – PG),  
Scott Arthur (Advocacy Assistant)

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### **418 Welcome, Drinks and Pizza**

JMP welcomed everyone to PG Assembly and thanked everyone for participating in the election process. Explained the role of the Assembly and its purpose in creating and debating policy.

Introduced MG and allowed them introduce themselves as the Chair of Postgraduate Committee.

JMP highlighted that the SU was currently seeking a postgraduate trustee and encouraged those assembled to run for the position. Explained the role of the trustee, and the positions duties and responsibilities.

### **419 Postgraduate Education Officer Q & A**

MM introduced himself, and explained what his job role is. He talked about some of the things he has been working on; including taking part in consultations regarding the impact of building works over summer. Explained that he was having conversations with academic leadership about funding for convenors. Introduced the enlighten app, and stated that it was mostly for undergraduates but that newer versions would be tailored towards postgraduate students. States that he has also been working on getting PG's increased access to sports. Also been working on changes to PGT Dissertations. Commented that he has been attending the UCU Strike picket line.

MG challenged MM on his attendance of the picket lines – stating that the PG Committee had mandated attendance but MM had not lived up to this expectation.

## **420 What does PG Assembly do?**

Chair introduced the role of the committee as the chief representative body of PG students.

## **421 UCU Strikes: Your Questions, and our update**

MG explained the reason for UCU taking strike action. Explained that the dispute was in regard to pensions, and that staff stand to lose approximately £200,000 over the course of their pension under current proposals. Highlighted that the SU's official policy is to support the strike action. Invited discussion.

Questioned were asked about whether the strike would affect teaching.

MG responded that it depends on the individual involved and whether they were striking – told those in attendance to ask their teachers for clarifications, but reminded them that lecturers are not obligated to inform students if they are striking.

One member sought clarifications about how lecturers would communicate with students.

MG explained that as it is a protected characteristic, staff would not need to inform students should teaching be cancelled.

## **422 Sky House: Update and Your thoughts**

JMP introduced the Sky House and briefly explained what it is and where it will be located.

MG outlined the concerns of the PG body; detailing that Sky House could lead to reduced desk numbers, that attempts were being made to secure a dedicated PG space Highlighted that PGC has a working group for Sky House and that issues raised in this forum can be taken to that group.

One member raised the idea of circumventing the consultation and instead having direct communication with someone in the institution who can provide more insight and information on Sky House.

MG concurred – agreeing that the PGC working group could begin working on this.

**\*Action: PGC working group to endeavour to get a dedicated space for PG's in Sky House and to facilitate the attendance of a member of university staff at the next PGA meeting.\***

The issue of teaching spaces in the new building was also raised as PG's have different needs to postgraduates, and it was perceived to be important that the building reflects this adequately.

## **423 Budget**

JMP introduced the budget, explaining that it is £15,000 and is broadly divided into four categories – activities (£6000), social grant (£3250), conference fund (£5450) and campaigns (£300). Explained what each of these categories funded, and noted that the budget had been reduced from previous years. Opened up to suggestions from those assembled.

A question was asked about the cap for social grant and conference, whether it was flat or negotiable.

MG clarified that in both cases the cap was non-negotiable and was fixed. The only exceptions are in the event of exceptional circumstances.

Another question was asked about why the budget had decreased when compared to previous years.

MG responded that the committee were disappointed too to discover the reduction, and that these reductions were happening across the board. Stated that the budget was set by union council previously and was challenged at the time.

Another question queried whether the committee had sufficient funds allocated to campaigns.

MG responded that this issue had come up before, and the committee were aware of it. Reiterated the desire of the committee to get involved in campaigns and invited members to contact him and others if they had areas of particular concern.

JMP asked for suggestions for events that can be run for PG students.

One idea was to offer more cultural events where the diversity and multiculturalism of the PG body could be celebrated. Further to this point, some members expressed a desire for events to be hosted later in the year when they knew more people, and thus could socialise more.

Another issue raised was a lack of publicity for some events – one member asserted that events were not publicised as well as he thought they could be. Perceived that fixing the publicity issue to be a priority.

MG agreed that publicity needed to improve but asserted that efforts have been hamstrung by university regulations regarding communication. Welcomed ideas about how to improve engagement.

Another view expressed pertained to when events were scheduled – with some members expressing concern that too many were scheduled towards the beginning of the academic year when members did not know each other. Reiterated the need to have more events towards the end of the year.

Another member suggested that there was disconnect between the varying levels of PGT students. Reiterated that cultural events were a good way to bridge this divide.

One member states that simple and cheap events like tea and cake could work, and help bridge the gap between PGR and PGT students.

A need to focus events towards international postgraduates was also identified, with one member commenting that they can be underrepresented.

Another idea to improve integration between PGR and PGT students was to have more inter-school and inter-disciplinary events held, facilitating communication between the various levels of the PG community.

In regard to the budget, one member highlighted that the budget was finite and needed to be used carefully, and that this is supported by a good attendance at events.

A further question was raised in regard to whether the postgraduate community could fundraise for the benefit of the Postgraduate Committee and Postgraduate Assembly.

**\*Action: MM to explore whether this fundraising is possible, and feedback in the future.\***

The point was raised concerning the possibility of having an online survey or suggestion box put in scholars bar, where PG students could drop ideas for events, as well as issues and concerns.

It was decided that this is definitely feasible – with JM to lead.

**\*Action: JM to lead on the implementation of an online survey or suggestion box in order to collect more data from PG students.\***

#### **424 Mailing List**

Chair introduced the mailing list and explained how to sign up to it and keep up to date.

#### **425 Time, Date and Place of the Next Meeting**

Chair explained that the next meeting is scheduled for 28<sup>th</sup> January, in Scholars Bar between 17:30 and 19:00

#### **AOB**

Nothing raised.