

Our Ref: GSCC15-16/M2/12.11.2015

## GRADUATE STUDENT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Thursday 12 November 2015, 2.00 pm, Bragg Committee Room

**Present:** Professor Haniff (Chair), Ankita Anirban (SP), Christopher Ashcroft (SD), Hippolyte Astier (SP), Ms Dann (Graduate Office), Nandan Gokhale (CSC), Tejas Guruswamy (QS), James Hamp (TCM), Kamrad Javid (AP), Siri Luthman (BSS), Peter Newton (TFM), Professor Parker (HoD), Peter Townsend (SMF), Ms Khan (Secretary)

**Apologies:** Adrien Amiguez (QM), Carmen Palacios Berraquero (NanoDTC), Giovanna Cottin-Buracchio (HEP), Yago del Valle-Inclan (NP), Konrad Viebahn (AMOP), Leah Weiss (OE), Bono Xu, Mrs Weale

### 1. Minutes

Minutes of the meeting held on 8 October were confirmed with the following amendment to item 4(i):

'The secretary would enquire as to whether a microwave could be made available in the canteen for student use.'

### 2. Matters arising

- i) Graduate Student Conference budget – the secretary reported that she would be meeting with the organizing committee to discuss the budget after the GSSC meeting.
- ii) Food and drink (water dispenser and vending machines) – the Laboratory Superintendent had confirmed that he was arranging for more water dispensers to be installed and for the vending machines to be re-stocked regularly. The secretary would follow up with the Laboratory Superintendent on the location of the water dispensers.
- iii) Skills training and information – an information webpage for graduate students in the Department of Physics was currently in development, and an update would be provided at the next GSCC meeting in January 2016. A consultant had been hired by the School to work with departments to investigate and identify skills training opportunities for graduates, and ways of publicizing information. The chair and secretary would be meeting with the consultant, and with Noel Rutter in the Department of Materials Science & Metallurgy, to develop a coordinated plan.

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- iv) Bicycle sheds – the chair had obtained a plan of the West Cambridge site which illustrated the location of existing bicycle sheds, potential sites for installing new sheds and opportunities for expanding existing sheds. It was noted that a potential site was no longer viable due to its proximity to trees, and that other sheds were not in the vicinity of the Bragg or Mott buildings. The most appropriate form of action was to expand the sheds near Nanophotonics and the Chair would instruct the Laboratory Superintendent to install additional racks. The situation would continue to be monitored to ascertain whether shed usage was affected by the opening of the new Maxwell building.
- v) Reimbursement of expenses – the secretary reported that this was work in progress, and would provide an update at the next GSCC meeting.
- vi) Update GSCC webpage – the secretary confirmed that the GSCC webpage had been updated with the current members of the committee, and copies of approved minutes. However, it was noted that further amendments and the addition of the terms of reference, were required, and that this would be completed over the next couple of weeks.

### **3. Chairman's business**

- i) Cavendish III - the Head of Department reported that the Maxwell building would be opening in the next couple of weeks, with staff occupying office space, and the laboratory space available for use in February 2016. It was noted that RIBA Work Stage 1 (Preparation) had been completed for the next stage of the Cavendish III development, and that RIBA Work Stage 2 (Concept Design) had been sent out for tender. The architects were currently being appointed, and were scheduled to set up office onsite in December 2015, with the ultimate aim of obtaining planning permission by December 2016. On arrival, the architects would commence the stakeholder engagement plan in order to gather feedback on the design of the new building, particularly teaching provision, learning spaces and social cohesion. Graduate students and research groups were encouraged to take part in the consultation activities, which would consist of public facing meetings and questionnaires, in order to ensure that their views were rigorously represented.
- ii) IT provision – the chair reported that IT provision in the department was under review, and that Professor Ian Lesley would be leading the review team. The aim was to investigate what the department currently provides and how it relates to, or overlaps with, other IT functions in the University. Graduate students and research groups were encouraged to take part and provide feedback.
- iii) PRES survey results 2014-15 – the chair reported that the PRES survey results had been released to departments, and that the results for Physics were scheduled for discussion at the next GEC meeting. It was noted that the department had performed well on several themes, but that there was room for improvement on others. In addition, some departments had achieved higher completion rates, with the highest at 95%, and that ways of improving the completion rate would be investigated. A departmental response and action plan would be prepared, and an update provided at the next GSCC meeting.

#### 4. Graduate Student Conference

The organizing committee reported that recruiting speakers for talks was underway, with speakers registered from at least seven research groups. The first deadline had already passed, and more talks and posters were required, therefore greater publicity was needed to encourage students to submit by the second deadline on the 20<sup>th</sup> November.

**ACTION: The following actions were agreed in order to increase the number of talks and posters:**

- i) **student members to remind students of the second deadline by word of mouth, and also ask the Graduate Students Administrator to email a reminder.**
- ii) **the chair to talk to research groups who had not yet registered any speakers or posters, to encourage more engagement.**
- iii) **the secretary to investigate opportunities, and costs, for printing posters in the Anatomy and Astronomy departments for any students who missed the second deadline.**

It was noted that seven graduate students had been nominated for the Abdus Salam prize and that judging was underway.

#### 5. Reimbursement of Language Courses Fees

The chair reported that due to changes in the way that researcher development training for 2015-16 was being funded by the School, there was a need to formalise and document the process and criteria for enrolling and being reimbursed for language courses at the University Language Centre. It was noted that the process had not changed from previous years, but had been made more transparent and produced in a format more suitable to be included on the new graduate student information webpage, or in an updated Graduate Student Handbook.

Members were reminded that language courses were only one part of the researcher development training suite, and that the entire suite was currently being reviewed and formalised. The suite for 2014-15 consisted of:

1. Graduate Student Conference
2. Language Courses
3. Alumni/Careers Day
4. Scientific Writing courses

The review of the training suite was occurring over the next couple of weeks, and members were invited to contribute views as to what the training suite should include for 2015-16. The general rule of thumb for applying for funding was that training activities should not be too specific to a specialised area, or to a limited cohort, or be catered for through other means.

**ACTION: Members to send ideas for researcher development training to the secretary, in order to inform the plan for 2015-16.**

## 6. Graduate Student Matters

- i) Supply/demand information for departmental supervisors and demonstrators – information on demonstrator classes and spaces was not easy to see or find, and was not as transparent as the system used for viewing who had signed up for supervisions. Furthermore, some classes had not been able to recruit Physics graduate students as demonstrators and had resorted to recruit students from the Department of Materials Science & Metallurgy. It was noted that teaching was an important transferrable skill for graduate students and that a policy was required in order to encourage supervisors to allow students to take on work, and that this issue would be taken forward by the GEC.
- ii) Supervision rooms – rooms available for supervision mainly catered for groups of no more than three students, and therefore space was an issue. There was a need for supervision rooms more suited to small group teaching of five or more students. It was noted that more suitable rooms may become available when staff moved into the new Maxwell building, but that they would still need to be booked through designated staff in order to manage the resource effectively.

## 7. Any other business

- i) Graduate lectures – Feedback on the statistical methods course highlighted that the lectures were good and of value, but needed to be longer (at least 6-8 hours) and better publicised to encourage more students to attend. The current means of advertising graduate lectures was not fit for purpose, and would be reviewed as part of the skills training work with the School consultant.
- ii) Coffee morning - Siri Luthman confirmed that she had organised a coffee morning for graduate students, and that no one had participated, and encouraged student members to contact her if they were still interested.

## 8. Date of the next meeting

28<sup>th</sup> January 2016

[Secretary's note: later changed to the 27<sup>th</sup> January 2016 to accommodate a student workshop.]