



Our Ref: GSCC15-16/M6/11.08.2016

GRADUATE STUDENT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Thursday 11 August 2016, 2.00 pm, Bragg Committee Room

Present: Professor Haniff (Chair), Ankita Anirban (SP), Giovanna Cottin-Buracchio (HEP), Hippolyte Astier (SP), Nandan Gokhale (CSC), Tejas Guruswamy (QS), James Hamp (TCM), Siri Luthman (BSS), Peter Newton (TFM), Peter Townsend (SMF), Konrad Viebahn (AMOP), Ms Dann (Graduate Office), Ms Khan (Secretary)

Apologies: Adrien Amiguez (QM), Carmen Palacios Berraquero (NanoDTC), Christopher Ashcroft (SD), Kamrad Javid (AP), Leah Weiss (OE), Peter Newton (TFM), Yago del Valle-Inclan (NP), Dr Gripaios, Professor Parker (HoD)

1. Minutes

Minutes of the meeting held on 12 May 2016 were confirmed.

2. Matters arising

- i) Cavendish III survey update – the chair reported that 36 students had completed the online survey in order to give feedback before the consultation event. Student members noted that the three designs presented were interesting, but had some peculiar aspects to them, which implied that any preferred design option would require further consultation.
- ii) Alumni Industry Day update – members were informed that five external speakers had presented at the event, and that the event had attracted approximately 40-50 attendees. The event had been organized into two sessions with a break for networking. In addition, GSCC student members had been invited to lunch with the speakers before the event. It was reported that speakers enjoyed interacting with students and provided relevant and useful information. Attendees had been invited to provide feedback on the event via an online survey. Members agreed that the event had been a great success and that further events should be organised involving a different set of career trajectories. It was noted that the events would need to be publicised further in advance in order to maximize attendance.

The Cavendish Laboratory
19 J J Thomson Avenue
Cambridge CB3 0HE

Tel: +44 (0) 1223 337200

Email: srk44@phy.cam.ac.uk
www.phy.cam.ac.uk

ACTION: Student members to confirm when to hold the next two Alumni Industry Day events in 2016/17 so that they may be publicised at induction events in October 2016.

- iii) Policy for graduate engagement in UG demonstrating update – the chair reported that the proposed policy had been endorsed by GEC and would take effect from October 2016 for incoming students. Members were reminded that all PhD students would be able to volunteer. It was noted that Heads of Class would make their final selection from the pool of volunteers.
- iv) PTES survey 2015-16 update – the chair reported that the MAST programme had achieved a 92% response rate in the PTES survey and therefore had met the 85% target set by the School. MAST students would be sent an Amazon voucher as part of the School's incentive scheme. It was noted that the MPhil in Scientific Computing achieved a 64% response rate, and that Part III Physics achieved 63%. The School were pleased with the improvements in response rates. There was no further information to report on whether a similar incentive scheme would be in place for the PRES survey.
- v) EPSRC DTP Doctoral Prize 2016/2017 update - members were informed that seven nominations had been submitted to the School and that on average three prizes were awarded to Physics each year. It was noted that although the scheme was directed at supervisors, more information could be provided to students about the existence of the scheme and deadline. There was no further information to report on whether a similar Doctoral Prize scheme could be put in place for non-EPSRC students.
- vi) First year report update – members were informed that 75 students had submitted their first year report, giving a completion rate of 96%. Members reported that they had received feedback from students who had experienced problems, and noted that:
 - a. students should be informed in advance that they would have to resubmit a shorter version of their report if they exceeded the word-count;
 - b. there was still some confusion as to whether the bibliography contributed to the word-count total;
 - c. some students still hadn't received responses from their assessors with regards to setting a viva date.

3. Chairman's business

- i) Researcher development – that chair reported that a draft researcher development programme would be compiled over the next two weeks, and that student feedback would be required as to which courses to include.

ACTION: Student members to identify which training events to include in the programme and send to chair by Monday 15th August (via the GSCC secretary).

- ii) Information for current graduate students – members were informed that student volunteers would be required to test and review the draft webpages.
- iii) STFC accreditation – the chair reported that the Department had successfully passed the STFC's accreditation of its graduate training quality. There was only one aspect of the provision that required clarification which was to provide more information on transferrable skills training. Members reported that some supervisors were not

allowing students to take time out to take up transferrable skills training and that this also needed addressing.

- iv) School of Physical Sciences recommendations for "improving Graduate student experience" - the chair reported that the six recommendations had been endorsed by the GEC at School level, and had arisen out of a workshop organised by the School to discuss the outcomes of the PRES/PTES 2015 survey results. Members were informed that each recommendation was being addressed by the Department and noted that in the case of:
 - a. potential applicants: web resources would be used to guide them through the application process, rather than a named contact person due to the high volume of applications and queries received;
 - b. defining responsibilities: the Code of Practice for Research Students already fulfilled this purpose and stated the expectations and responsibilities of student, advisor and supervisor;
 - c. the advisor role: this would be clarified to staff and students to ensure that a contact person who was independent from the supervisor was allocated to each graduate student;
 - d. additional points of contact: the Deputy Head and the Graduate Office would fulfil this additional role for graduate students to help them access support when they need it;
 - e. information about courses: the University's Course Directory and Graduate Prospectus pages were updated annually and departmental webpages would also be updated to ensure that consistent and complete information about courses was available;
 - f. engaging with the Careers Service: the Department was arranging for the Careers Service to have a permanent presence on the Cavendish site for one day a week, to encourage graduate students to engage with the Careers Service early in their course.
- v) School of Physical Sciences PhD submission rates – members were informed that the Department had achieved an 85% PhD submission rate for 2011/12 starters, which meant 85% of those PhD students had completed within 4 years. The Department currently ranked 4th overall in the School, with Earth Sciences achieving 95%, Chemistry 89% and DAMPT 88%. It was noted that the Department had improved its completion rate from 65% to 85% over a three year period, and that a more robust first year reporting mechanism and student effort may have driven the improvement.

4. Graduate Student Conference 2016

Members were reminded that new organising committee members needed to be identified so that handover arrangements could commence. It was important to start planning the conference and publicising to students from October 2016.

ACTION: Student members to volunteer for the new organising committee and agree on a date for the conference.

5. Graduate Student Matters

- i) Appointment of supervisors – it was noted that normally principal supervisors were only allocated to PhD applicants if their appointment or post was of a duration that

covered the 4 year PhD period. It was acknowledged that it was highly disruptive for a student if a supervisor did leave the Department, but fortunately this was not a frequent occurrence. Furthermore, there was no benefit to insisting that only permanent members of staff could be a principal supervisor, as there were no assurances that they would not leave the Department. There was also no avoidance of paperwork, as processes had to be followed for a change of principal supervisor, no matter what the status of staff involved, or whether the second supervisor could take up the responsibility.

- ii) Department website – members noted the difficulties in updating graduate information and/or providing notices on the Department’s website. The secretary reported that access and updates would improve once the graduate webpages had gone live.

6. Any other business

- i) GSCC membership – members were reminded that normally GSCC student membership expired after a year’s service, and that a successor should be appointed from each research group. However the Chair was willing to extend membership for another year for those student members who felt it was beneficial to have two year membership, rather than one, for continuity.

ACTION: Student members to confirm if they wish to extend their membership of GSCC for another year, or nominate a successor from their group, by Thursday 25th August (via the GSCC secretary).

7. Date of the next meeting

1st September 2016