



## Postgraduate Academic Forum

St Andrews Students Association

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**Meeting date:** Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> March 2024 (9:30am-11:00am)

Small Rehearsal Room, Students Association

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**Student Attendance:** Cam Brown (Director of Education), Cooper Smith (Postgraduate Taught President), Callum Irvine (Postgraduate Research President), Emily Bannister (Academic Representation Intern).

**Staff Attendance:** Charles Warren (Associate Provost, Students), Jacqueline Rose (Associate Provost, Education), Kostas Zafeiris (Executive Officer to St Leonard's College), Frank Müller (Associate Vice Principle of Learning and Teaching), Ros Claase (Director of Student Experience), Hazel Grapes (St Leonard's Doctoral and Postgraduate College Co-ordinator), Lorna Dargan (Director of the Careers Centre).

**Apologies:** Claire Peddie (Proctor)

**Online:** Chase Greenfield (Academic Representation Coordinator)

**Chair:** Cam Brown (Director of Education)

**Minutes:** Emily Bannister (Academic Representation Intern)

- Welcome 5 minutes (DoEd)

Thank you all for attending today. We are looking forward to continuing the productive partnership between postgraduates and the university.

- Continuing the positive 5 minutes (PGR and PGT)

**PGR:** thank you for all the work you are doing and how much potential there is for improvement. A lot of points being raised will be relaying what has been said in emails sent to me.

**PGT:** at a high level all PGT Reps have an opinion. It's clear that PGT experience is positive and they receive a rigorous academic experience. All proud to be PGT students.

**DoEd:** as a PGT student thank you for the great work. Recieve a formidable university experience.

- Careers 30 minutes

**PGR:** 0.4% of PGRs make it into academia. Needs to be more support for those who cannot go into 'industry'. Suggests restructuring the relationship between careers office and schools- currently the role can be as much or as little as they wish- careers officer could find 15 concrete examples of potential careers for this school. Maybe school specific careers fayres so doing a PGR isn't a waste of time. Currently aren't being shown right jobs for someone who has just completed a doctorate.

PGRs feel a lack of support. In comparison to Oxford, St Andrews PGRs get jobs later after graduation. One specific email comment states that "Coming to St Andrews was a detriment to my careers path."

**PGT:** here for such a short period of time and a lot of careers advice is too general or catered to undergraduates. Careers could support academic careers advisor role to offer more specific advice.

**Director of the Careers Centre:** agrees that the concept of 'industry' isn't related to arts and humanities. Careers have been working to develop case studies. School employability officer will have specified hours next year and specific tasks to work on- working on a resource pack to support them. Would like school employability officers not to give careers life because this is not their job (this requires a postgraduate qualification). In the UK job market 85% employers don't care what a persons degree is in, more focus is on what your passion is in. Challenge at St Andrews is knowing the labor market students will go into- school employability officer can help structure how you think about yourself in this environment. Postgraduate careers fayre in every school is a large undertaking and careers aren't specifically asking for a specific degree, let alone a specific postgraduate degree- lots

of jobs also open to undergraduates, thus postgraduates will enter at same level as undergraduates but are statistically more likely to be promoted faster. An information fayre may be more helpful. Will never be a perfect fix and no university in the UK has this fully successful.

**PGR:** using employability officer for networking could be useful.

**AVP Learning and Teaching:** last year 95 employer visits and events at St Andrews. Offering these schemes are useless if not engaged with by students. Offered workshop for PhDs in History, last year no one came, and the year before one student attended. Cohort for those who we are offering services to need to engage. Oxford comment was irrelevant.

**PGR:** Reasserts that the previous statement from the email reveals the efficiency of Oxford PGR employment.

**AVP Learning and Teaching:** personal experience at Oxford so understands that it is not fully positive or easy. Thinking of embedding postgrad employment more specifically at PGT and PGR level at St Leonard's. This will provide postgraduates with a wide range of options after graduation.

**Director of the Careers Centre:** student uptake at events is difficult. Due to the location of St Andrews, it is difficult to convince staff to come. Is there anything we can do communication wise to aid with student engagement? Is there anything we can do to find out what postgraduates want?

**PGT:** understands that postgraduate uptake is low- struggle themselves to get their student representatives to engage. When you see a general email as a postgraduate, it is easy to assume that it relates only to undergraduates. Students have an overload of events and emails- receive 4 or 3 emails of the same event so instantly disregard emails. However, part of issue is that students need to actually read emails.

**Director of the Careers Centre:** careers do a lot of things relevant to postgraduates but they don't always have postgraduate label on them. Postgraduate careers appointments are often unfilled so become undergraduate appointments.

**PGR:** PGRs automatically think careers events are for undergraduates- maybe a separate email outlining 'postgraduates wanted' or 'postgraduate specific event'.

**PGT:** email title of 'postgraduates wanted' would be super important.

**Director of the Careers Centre:** is there relevancy in staff putting effort into an event that no one attends?

**Associate Provost, Education:** highly conscious that PGTs have little time outside of studies and that for PGRs to think of their future career outside of academia may be intimidating. Suggests that university should reaffirm variety of careers- 'here's some other possibilities' of what you can do after university.

**PGR:** not making it into academia often seen as failure. St Connect could be more a more powerful tool.

**PGT:** vast majority of PGTs aren't aware of St Connect. PGTs only in the St Andrews community for a short time- needs to be made clear from early on of careers resources and opportunities available. More streamlined labeling of events will instill PGT interest.

**AVP Learning and Teaching:** alumni, careers and communication can all be put under same 'bubble'. University is currently reviewing ways to communicate with students- will add in a short point about emails and labeling. Business transformation are working on a portal because university is currently too reliant on emails which is out of touch with its current student cohort. Addresses the feeling of PGR 'failure'- need to assert range of opportunities from the start of thier PGR journey so aware that they are aware any job is a success. Alumni Connections- how do we ensure postgraduates can connect with alumni?

**Director of the Careers Centre:** had to run coffee connect twice last semester because of the amount of alumni willing to be mentors. Alumni community very willing to give back to the university.

- Alumni

**PGR:** connections with alumni will enable growth of St Andrews students and institution. One email outlines that its "more difficult than it needs to be" to get any kind of employment. Another email states that "St Andrews leaves a bad taste in mouth"- this graduate felt more of a customer than having a continued relationship with the university. Private schools in UK and US effectively continue the relationship with school and graduate- one specific school has phone call catching up/ senior members of university dancing to happy birthday- these are silly things but they give the illusion of caring for alumni.

**PGT:** alumni loyalty in US is form of religious faith- always 'are' a student there rather than 'was' a student there.

**DoEd:** undergraduate students don't feel a tangible relationship with St Andrews- well off students would rather donate to high schools than this university.

**AVP Learning and Teaching:** some American norms may not be agreeable to a UK audience. More concerned with provisions given to students so that students have a positive relationship here that will leave a lasting positive impression.

**Director of Student Experience:** do we know the dating of this email- could it have been related to COVID restrictions?

**PGR:** range is pre and post covid, up until last November so potentially effected by COVID experience.

**PGT:** PGTs pay the most per contact hour for studies (wants to highlight that many believe this is going well)- need to be getting positive experience for their money. School specific issue of only receiving 10-minute office hours- small underlying issues play into wider St Andrew's experience.

**Associate Provost, Education Associate Provost, Education:** PGTs graduate fairly rapidly. Is there any issue with PGRs of an interim widow?

**PGR:** there is an interim window but PGRs still feel connected in this time because often they are teaching,

**Executive Officer to St Leonard's College:** his own emails since January are very positive and reflect university's great connections and communication to alumni- lots of invites and interest in events.

**PGR:** concerned with how PGRs experiencing leaving St Andrews.

**Director of Student Experience:** main focus needs to be on the 'on programme' experience so students aren't left with a "bad taste" when they leave St Andrews. Need to reinforce university opportunities, space and community so that when leaving students have an overwhelmingly positive experience and feel proud to be associated with the university.

**AVP Learning and Teaching:** Development contacts a wide range of alumni every year, interested in what the university could do to change the view of alumni that don't want to be associated with the university post graduation.

**PGR:** A further email highlights dissatisfaction with the speed in which they were cut off from the university community- taken off the School of English database. When looking for jobs cannot be found on St Leonard's website so cannot prove involvement with the university.

**St Leonard's Doctoral and Postgraduate College Co-ordinator:** Students are asked if they would like to be linked to this profile- has to be content.

**Director of Student Experience:** sounds as if this process has not be followed or followed too quickly.

**PGR:** prospective employers need to be able to find students. Needs to be a rethink of what it means to be a graduate of St Andrews.

**Executive Officer to St Leonard's College:** email inbox for postgrads could be looked into.

**DoEd:** why don't we allow continuation of emails?

**Executive Officer to St Leonard's College:** this is probably security reasons but we could look into how long this email account is active after graduation.

**PGR:** further email highlights dissatisfaction with the speed in which they were cut off from their university email account. This graduate's email account was deleted three hours before the deadline.

**Executive Officer to St Leonard's College:** This person waited 6 months before their email was deleted, they could have acted sooner. They had enough warning.

**Director of Student Experience:** we can talk to IT to investigate the positives, negatives and how to prepare for university email account to be taken away. But will need to find a balance with IT for what they can do.

**AVP Learning and Teaching:** vulnerability of hacking will have to be taken into consideration. Would be good 'PR' to have list of postgraduate alumni.

**Associate Provost, Education Associate Provost, Education:** are PGT and PGR interested in the same content of alumni information or content of undergraduates?

**AVP Learning and Teaching:** is there anything else the university can do to help student experience?

**PGR:** St Andrews prides itself on league tables, lots of teaching done by PGRs so there's a desire for continued support beyond university- would help them stand out on job applications as would show employers truly care about the careers of students.

**PGT:** there is a PGT frustration when courses are led by anyone other than professors.

**AVP Learning and Teaching:** Uni currently looking at enhancing teaching experience and qualification PGRs get when here. Post-doctoral semester or year

of teaching- this is extremely complicated, but university could try a mentorship scheme to allow PGRs to demonstrate their specific skills. Would like this externally accredited but some students may not be motivated to be taught by a PGR.

**PGR:** may not be the case of PGRs teaching a full module- suggests that they could be lecturer or present research for one or two lectures a semester. Could be advertised in module handbook that these lectures are incredibly beneficial to students.

**AVP Learning and Teaching:** for years has offered voluntary office hour but there was not much uptake.

**PGR:** his own voluntary office hour has lots of uptake.

**AVP Learning and Teaching:** university is currently looking at all of this including the mentoring aspect.

**Director of the Careers Centre:** careers will see people for 3 years after graduation. Students like to hear from alumni early in careers.

- **AOCB 5 mins (DoEd)**

- a. Communication

**DoEd:** will invite postgraduate discussion which will impact the developing university app.

- b. Student representation

**PGT:** has officers and representatives that he has never met. PGTs are extremely busy and don't feel like their feedback is properly taken care of. Could get presidents and representatives if compensated for their work- both financial and proof university is listening.

**PGR:** timetable is extremely full- dividing time between representation and thesis is difficult. Needs proof of recognition and financial support for student's efforts because representatives do not want to give time to representation without clear recognition.

**PGT:** lack of compensation is a big barrier to representation.

**Director of Student Experience:** Student Partnership Agreement will look at way university responds to- and appreciates- its student volunteers. Ros and Chase will be looking at recognition of students moving forward. PGT President and PGR President are doing a great job.

**PGR:** could be paid for writing but chose to write about school or library for free- in a way is losing out through representation.

c. St Leonard's Anniversary

**AVP Learning and Teaching:** interested in learning of meaningful ideas that would help students engage with 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St Leanards.

**PGR:** glass poem engraving of recent poet could be placed as a permanent marker of the St Leonard's impact.

**PGT:** would like to affirm the positive and strong St Andrews experience.

**DoEd:** thank you for your time and productivity today.

- Meeting adjourned