Minutes of the Postgraduate and part-time tutor liaison committee

Monday 28th February 2022

12.30 – 1.30 pm

Microsoft Teams

Present
Professor Ewen Cameron, Head of School (EC)
Dr Manuel Fernandez-Gotz, Head of Archaeology (MFG)
Dr Guillaume Robin, Director of Teaching, Archaeology (GR)
Dr Richard Oosterhoff, Director of Teaching, History pre-honours (RO)
Magda Kowalczuk, Head of Resources (MK)
Anne Brockington, Tutor and Demonstrator Co-ordinator (AB)
Jess Nutt, Archaeology representative (JN)
Richard Kendall, Classics representative (RK)

Apologies
Monique De Pace, Archaeology representative
Dr Lucy Grig, Head of Classics
Dr Calum Maciver, Director of Teaching, Classics
Kerry Penman, HR
Dr Catriona Pickard, Director of Undergraduate Studies – Chair
Caroline Proctor, Director of Professional Services

1. Welcome, Introductions and Apologies
The apologies were noted.

2. Approve minutes from last meeting
The minutes of the last meeting on 29th November 2021 were approved.

3. Matters Arising
In the absence of Dr Pickard there did not appear to be any outstanding items from the last meeting requiring any further investigation.

4. Reports from Subject Area representatives
Archaeology JN reported that the feedback she had received from students was that they were all very happy with the in person tutorials and the written feedback they had received. The feedback sessions were not well attended, some students reporting that they did not think they were "official" as only emailed by tutor. MFG advised that the course organiser should send out communications about these sessions.

Classics

RK had spoken to tutors who attended the Classics postgraduate seminars but nothing much to report back. He has found that students were happy are that there are aspects of teaching that are now in person. He also reported that, like the Archaeology feedback sessions the Classics Q&A session were not well attended.

History

There was no History representative at the meeting.

5. Recruitment for 2022/2023

AB talked the committee through the **PGPT recruitment 2022-2023 slide** and showed the Basic GH Recruitment timeline, Availability form - 2022-2023 draft, Courses 2022-2023, Timeline - new and out of contract tutors and demonstrators, Timeline - current tutors and demonstrators and Website - How to apply documents.

SMC have agreed that for the 2022/2023 recruitment cycle it should be possible to recruiting incoming Year 1 PhD students as GH tutors and demonstrators, along with Year 4 and above where appropriate and where supervisors happy with this.

Basic GH Recruitment timeline

Two lots of recruitments will be required. The exact timescales are provisional, especially as we will have to work around the People and Money downtime.

Recruitment of current PhD students will happen as in previous years.

A later recruitment will be undertaken for incoming Year 1 PhD students. This will only be sent to offer holders rather than all applicants in order to try and restrict the number who might drop out after having been offered tutor or demonstrator hours. This is an extension of what has had to happen in previous years to fill any gaps.

Availability form - 2022-2023 draft

Some fields that are no longer needed have been removed to streamline the form but the main update is to change from asking how many groups the tutors and demonstrators wish to teach to how many hours they wish to teach.

The aim is to make this clearer as, within Archaeology and Classics, there are variations in the tariffs assigned to courses. It is hoped this will help all applying for tutoring or demonstrating to appreciate the commitment involved, but especially incoming Year 1 PhD students.

The options listed equate, very roughly, to 1, 2 or 3 groups, especially for the History tariffs. There is also an option of approx. 130 hours for those only tutoring for one or other semester where there may be a little more flexibility. The first three options are within the 9 hours average working hours per week the University mandates.

Courses 2022-2023

The courses list contains all the usual information, including the link to Path, but this year also shows the total hours per group (contact, preparation, marking and feedback) and gives an average per week. This average is a very rough indication as it is the total divided by 12, as most courses are contained within 12 weeks.

Timeline - new and out of contract tutors and demonstrators
Timeline - current tutors and demonstrators

Additionally it is hoped that the timelines will help by making clear all the steps that need to happen. They include an explanation as to who counts as "new" and who "current". The steps and information are consistent across the two timelines.

Website - How to apply
The website will be updated to follow the timelines with a section for each of the steps allowing the current two pages will be amalgamated.

The documents will be sent to the committee with the Minutes and as usual the Heads of Subject and Teaching Directors will also be sent the job descriptions to comment on.

The committee discussed the plan involved thoroughly and both administrative and pedagogical issues were raised and mainly related to the recruitment of incoming Year 1 PhD students.

Administratively these centred around dealing with managing gaps resulting from potential late dropouts due to financial issues and the danger of PhD students overcommitting to tutoring or demonstrating in order to finance their studies.

Pedagogically the difficulties of Year 1 PhD students balancing the variety of demands posed by an advanced level of study as well as a new location were raised. This is particularly marked with overseas students coming from a different educational system.

These concerns are all recognised and will be watched for and kept under review.

There is a need to take into account the need to be able to recruit enough tutors so that the existing tutors are not overloaded.

Year 1 PhD students have been used, in very small numbers, in the past where there have been gaps in the tutors and demonstrators available. This plan looks to formalise and clarify the situation.

The role of the supervisors will be vital in ensuring that study for and the completion of the PhD are safeguarded and the timelines and website strengthen the message that PhD students should discuss their plans with them in advance. This is important for both Year 1 and also Year 4 + students.

It is difficult dealing with late dropouts from tutoring and demonstrating and it is acknowledged that this is more likely with Year 1 incoming PhD students. It cannot be eliminated completely, there are always current PhD students whose circumstances change after they have been allocated hours and have to pull out.

It is hoped that it can be mitigated by having a larger pool of tutors and demonstrators and not overloading the current PhD ones may allow more leeway to deal with this. The recruitment will also be directed only at offer holders rather than all applicants to help in this regard.

The expectation is that only a small minority of Year 1 PhD students will be tutors or demonstrators. The two stage recruitment is needed to be able to target only offer holders at the point when most will have received their offers and heard about any HCA scholarships. It will also allow current PhD students to be considered first in the first round, students within their prescribed period of study first and then any Year 4 +. Any gaps can then be addressed by the second round of recruitment.

The move to the use of hours rather than groups was discussed. The aim is to make the commitment involved in tutoring and demonstrating clearer, especially around the 9 hours average working hours imposed by the University.

JN, as one of this year's incoming Year 1 PhD tutors, agreed that this would be more logical. RK suggested that more information should be added to the courses list and also a note to contact their supervisor and / or the course organiser about the effort involved, such as the fluctuations in hours due to deadlines and the extra time new tutors and demonstrators may take as opposed to experienced ones.

The email to offer-holders when the second round of recruitment opens will include this information as will a slide that will be included in the March Virtual PhD Open Day. This should hopefully help manage expectations.

Communication will be key and the following elements should be particularly stressed:
- all applying for tutor and demonstrator hours should discuss their plans with their supervisor
- there may be a small number of places available, no guarantees
- only a maximum of an average of 9 hours per week will be offered
- information about averages given

AB will review the text again and strengthen these messages where possible and send the updated documents, along with job descriptions, to the Undergraduate Director, the Heads of Subject Area and the Teaching Directors for review.

6. AOB

There were no items raised.

Date of next meeting: Week 11 - Monday 4th April - 12.30 to 1.30 pm