

Doctoral School Open Meeting
6 March 2023

The following topics were raised and discussed:

1. [What the Doctoral School has been working on recently in response to PGR feedback](#)
2. [The College's support for those in financial difficulties](#)
3. [Teaching contracts](#)

1. What the Doctoral School has been working on recently in response to PGR feedback

- a) PGR study space – based on the space survey results from last summer:
 - The survey showed that you see PGR study space as an important way to build a sense of community and want a mix of quiet individual desks with space for group work and socialising near to facilities e.g. kettle / microwave. It is important that the space has good natural light, is clean and quiet.
 - The Doctoral School is working with Estates to identify possible areas in the College which could fulfil these requirements. Once a short-list has been drawn up, there will be a consultation period with the PGR community, with the aim of getting something in place for the 2023/24 academic year.
- b) Improving the experience for disabled PGRs – as a result of last year's PRES survey outcome:
 - A section has been developed on the [Doctoral School microsite](#) to improve signposting for disabled PGRs.
 - A series of PGR-specific access arrangements (e.g. for the viva) have been drawn up in collaboration with D&N.
 - Supervisors attended a training session to build their awareness of working with neurodivergent PGRs.
- c) Financial support:
 - The [Doctoral School Research Awards](#) have been run for a second year.
 - The [PGR Career Enhancement Placement Scheme](#), which provides funding for self-funded and College-funded PGRs to do a placement.
 - Alignment of College studentship Ts&Cs to those of the UKRI studentships e.g. introduction of paid sick leave for College-funded students
 - The [PGR funding sources](#) webpage has been updated

2. The College's support for those in financial difficulties

Tom Pease, Head of International and Money Advice, provided an overview of the financial support his team can provide our PGRs:

- His team can provide tips on keeping our costs down and [advice](#) on budgeting, managing your finances, managing your debt: moneymatters@royalholloway.ac.uk.
- The [Study Support Grant](#) is an amount of money available to all eligible students, including PGRs, who are facing financial difficulties. It can be applied for annually.

3. Teaching contracts

There was a lively and informative discussion of the challenges many of you are experiencing around teaching contracts. The main topics raised were:

- a) Lack of consistency across departments:
 - Lack of alignment on pay between departments e.g. PGRs are being paid to do marking in one department but not in another.
 - There are more teaching opportunities in some departments than others.
 - Some of you are paid for marking, others not.
 - Some of you are paid for attending the lecture you are running a seminar on, others not.
- b) Paid preparation time:
 - The amount of paid preparation time for teaching compared to other University of London Colleges: it appears that other UofL Colleges provide 3 hours' worth of paid preparation in comparison to the 1.5 hours paid by Royal Holloway.
 - It was felt important that amount of paid preparation time should reflect whether you are teaching a new topic for the first time.
- c) Marking:
 - Some of you feel that you are not given enough support to understand how to mark.
 - Those who were able to sit down with other markers to discuss the marking beforehand, rather than just been given the rubric, found this very useful.
- d) Teaching contracts:
 - Concern about the impact of zero hours contracts i.e. lack of sick pay.
 - Dissatisfaction with the lack of a relationship with HR to help you better understand your teaching contract – so that you are clear on the expectations e.g. around marking / the pay you get for prep. time. Currently no opportunity for you to discuss or negotiate your contract.
 - Concern that the teaching contracts do not cater to those with EDI considerations.

ACTIONS for the Doctoral School, working with the Directors of PGR Education, to take in light of this discussion:

1. To liaise with HR to try to find solutions to the concerns raised around the teaching contract process.
2. To conduct sector research around paid preparation time and to see what can be done to align Royal Holloway's policy with the sector.
3. To consider how we can achieve more consistency across departments, with the emphasis on raising the standard up to the current best examples.
4. To report back on progress at the next Doctoral School Open Meeting (May 2023).