

# PGR SCO January 2021

## Introduction

It's 2021! Hurray! Well done to everyone reading this for making it through 2020. "Between the years" (as us Germans call the time between the last day of work in December, and the first day back in January), I was making sure to completely shut down my systems, and get the rest I need, so that I'd be all ready to perform again come the first day back!

## Goals

This month, my aim was to critically advance the construction sites I had opened last term. These were: providing support for PGRs' specific needs - specifically how Proficio can offer this, financial matters, looking at mental health, advancing the GTA/GLA Campaign, the YUFE Project, pushing office space (though somewhat in the background due to lack of urgency).

## What have I done this month?

To kick things off I met with both Annecy Lax (Deputy Dean of Postgraduate Education) and Sian Lovesy (SU Advice) at the very start of term. With Annecy, I discussed the following matters:

### Meeting with Annecy 10<sup>th</sup> January

- Courses on **Proficio**
  - A **Self-Development Course**
    - A course aimed at PGRs to further increase their resilience during the difficult times we are facing at the moment. Topics would include the four horsemen of PGR mental health: anxiety, imposter syndrome, isolation and motivation; and becoming aware of your boundaries, goals and needs.
  - Making the most of your **supervisor** (and other introductory courses)
    - This evolved from a previous action point (regarding supervisor/supervisee expectations) and is a course that is already offered on Proficio. I made a case for this one to be held earlier in the term, and generally also an outline to be made of the courses that students should visit during their first terms as PGRs.
  - Opening **department-specific** training to a more general PGR audience

- This would involve a conversation with graduate directors to open up some department specific PGR training courses for the general PGR population. In this way, PGR students with interdisciplinary study subjects/interests could more easily attend training courses offered by different departments. These would be advertised over Proficio or a similar platform (e.g. Moodle for starters, while Proficio undergoes some changes to be able to show these courses in the future).
  - A course for **teacher training**
    - This ties in with demands made by the GTA campaign, which (besides hoping to push higher employment numbers,) hopes to improve GTA training and conditions generally.
    - We want to better assess training needs and provide training courses accordingly. In my meeting with Annecy, we decided to set up another meeting with people from OD and EJ (Social Science convenor, who is very knowledgeable about modern teaching techniques) to see what can be done -> more on this in next report.
  - Proficio courses for **other career paths**
    - E.g. looking into consulting. For this, we are hoping to be in contact with Essex Start Ups, to see what can be arranged.
- Departmental/university obligation toward **providing research funds**
  - We want to investigate what financial support departments can provide for PGR students hoping to run experiments. We are also hoping to expand the ways Proficio funds can be used to finance expenses on services such as transcriptions. In the next step, we will catch up with Sanja Bahun (Dean of Postgraduate Education) to see what can be arranged.
- Making **PGR-relevant trainings more visible**
  - This relates to the e-mails you often receive from Organisational Development as staff members of the university. The difficulty here is, however, that you often can't really tell whether they are at all relevant to you. In future, we hope to make it clearer which OD training is relevant, and in fact, recommended for PGRs to take.
- Exploring **supervision arrangements** further
  - Something that is ongoing work – (but is moving slightly in the background pending the Proficio course “making the best out of your supervisor” in early March. We are hoping to make PGRs

more aware of what they can expect from their supervisor, and the possibility of acquiring another supervisor, if it helps their work.

- **PGR Socials**
  - As promised, we discussed getting together soon to discuss and plan an academic-based PGR Social, where we can talk about our projects informally! We have yet to set up a meeting to discuss this – I hope to get to it in February!

### **Meeting with Sian 4<sup>th</sup> January**

- Creating a **website for PGRs for mental health** awareness day
  - Raising **awareness** of the four horsemen of PGR mental health: anxiety, imposter syndrome, isolation and motivation: symptoms, understanding root causes, and what to do as quick fixes.
  - **Sharing different real stories** around PGR Mental Health, to take people struggling with different issues “by the hand” and make them feel they are not alone.
- Looking at creating a course (like the one talked about above re: **self-development course** on Proficio), and/or **group talking sessions/1:1s**, where people share their stories about everyday PhD life.
- Creating a **working group** for PGR mental health involving SWIS, OD, VP Welfare, PGR SCO, and Sian.

### **Meeting with PGR MH working group 28<sup>th</sup> February**

- Introductions, assessing the status quo, plan to set up recurring meetings & reach out to interested parties in pushing this cause.

### **Meeting with the SCOs**

- Together with the SCO for students with disabilities, SCO LGBTQ+, SCO SU Services, I have organised a **casual social evening for everyone**. The social was then held on 2<sup>nd</sup> February.
- Following a Vote of No Confidence in a fellow SCO, which I found to be lacking evidence to properly substantiate allegations, I have started a movement with fellow SCOs to **better protect SCOs from VNCs** by altering the bylaws. We are now in the process of making a proposal for a new VNC process.
- I am also heading an effort to organise a **social for our parliament reps** such that we can better connect between our different communities. More on that next month.

### **YUFE Meetings (every second Monday)**

- We discussed recruitment numbers for the postdoc call and talked about the next steps in the application process.

### **What can be expected in the next month?**

Next month, I hope to continue my work on the different issues I have mentioned.

I am particularly excited about advancing the conversation around Proficio. I have already booked a meeting in to discuss plans for a teacher training course with Social Science Convenor EJ, PGRE DD Annecy Lax and representatives of OD.

I am also looking forward to applying to, and hopefully, attaining the position of the “SU PGR Convenor”, which will allow me to carry out my previous work in a larger capacity and allow me to hopefully deliver results faster – touch wood!

I am very passionate about pursuing my work in the PGR mental health work group and am super excited to have my work around this published on an SU website for mental health awareness day.

Lots of love,

Julia

