

# PGR SCO November 2020

## Introduction

Yoo! It was my first month re-elected as PGR officer and I was very excited to start my work in the new academic year. LET'S DO THIS!

## Goals

Though times were super crazy, I wanted to **offer my support** to PGR students to the best of my abilities. This included **getting a feel for what is needed** and what PGRs find most difficult specifically during this time.

A big point here was the **GTA/GLA Campaign**, which is hoping to **push employment numbers** of PGRs during the pandemic.

Another point was **office space**, both as the ongoing issue, and as the acute situation, exacerbated pandemic.

A PGR alumnus contacted me to extend the time it was possible for “fresh **alumni**” to **access the library services**. So, I have taken it upon myself to see what is possible to help them!

On the **YUFE Project**, where I am part of the Work Package “Staff Journey”, the goal is to finalize the PostDoc call.

## What have I done this month?

To **get a feel for the needs** of PGR students, the other SU representatives and I **hosted a meeting** and invited all PGRs to tell us about how they are doing.

We often heard that PGRs felt really quite isolated and would like to be involved in more cohort building activities.

What stood out was that unlike very social events, they would prefer to attend **semi-professional, more academic functions**, where they can exchange ideas about each other's research. This idea is now in the idea box and is being properly conceptualized by myself and the PGRE team, and will hopefully come into fruition early in 2021!

What I have also taken away with me is that PGRs would prefer to be **contacted via e-mail**, so this is what I will be doing in my next communications!

On a more sensitive note, I have come to realize that many PGRs, like me, have suffered, and still are suffering, from **different mental health issues** – both general and exacerbated by the pandemic. So, I have created a “PGR

Mental Health Action Plan", which I have discussed with VP Welfare, VP Engagement, and which I am hoping to implement in due course.

Regarding **GTA numbers**, it was very much a slow fight, with the university quite unable to change their position because of financial difficulties on their end. I had several meetings with my co-representatives, members of the GTA campaign, the SU and the university, and it is still very much an ongoing issue, unfortunately.

On **office space**, I have had several discussions with SU and the University highlighting the need for increased office space at the university. I and other PGR representatives pushed for the need for each PGR student to have a fixed office space. A hot-desk is not enough. Especially during the pandemic, quite a few GTAs complained about not being able to access office space very often.

Unfortunately, office space is **generally a very difficult issue** that the university has been working on for a very long time, and a huge limiting factor is simply that the university campus has its physical limitations. In the future, I will ask Departments to co-ordinate better, such that spaces which are still free in other Departments can be occupied by students from other Departments.

When the **November lockdown** started and PGRs wanted back into their offices, I have continuously pushed for a review and clarification on the possibility of them doing so. Unfortunately, there is a discrepancy in information passed between the Departments and the PGRE team in terms of the authority to provide access. But I am on my way to sorting this.

I had different meetings both with members of the library and the PGRE team (and e-mail contact with the alumni team) regarding the alumni's wish to be able to **access library resources for a bit longer after their submission**. However, all attempts here ended in vain, as the library would have to re-negotiate all its contracts, which they are currently not in the position to do. I have also asked whether it would at all be possible to extend the student status of PGRs, but a member of the PGRE team pointed out that this would quickly become a visa violation for members from outside the UK, and an issue for the home office. So, no success at this front, I'm sorry! However, now that I've pointed out this need, I hope that this issue may be picked up again during the next negotiations!

In terms of **casual socials**, I have hosted one with my own Department, which was very successful! I would love to somehow ensure that all Departments had these sort of informal catch-ups, but it is difficult to initiate them externally and

I can only encourage other PGR Departmental reps to initiate an informal social! They are very worthwhile and are a wonderful way to build a cohort. Within the **YUFE Project**, we have been able to finalize the PostDoc call and are now accepting applications. Exciting!

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

One thing I am very excited about is the **PGR Week**, where the PGRE team has organised different social and academic events on zoom. I am looking forward to a **focus group on Proficio**, where we will investigate how we can alter the programmes on offer to better suit PGR needs.

I am also looking forward to continue working on issues, such as the GTA Campaign, PGR Mental Health, socials, office space, and finalizing the selection committee for the YUFE PostDoc programme.

Lots of love,

Julia

