

Town hall 26.08.20

IGS welcomed PGR students to an online Town hall to provide updates and answer any questions they might have. Mary Cryan chaired the session.

- Mary began the meeting with an overview of the support available to all PGR students and the recent changes to personnel within this network. The following link will show this list of contacts: <http://web.inf.ed.ac.uk/infweb/student-services/igs/phd/student-support/resolving-problems>

It was also pointed out that if students are unsure about who to contact or need any advice then they can contact igs@inf.ed.ac.uk for a chat.

The university has opened its new Health and Wellbeing Centre in Potterow which will hold all university support areas from the Student Disability Office to the pharmacy and health centre. Please see the following link for more information:

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/students/health-wellbeing/health-and-wellbeing-centre>

- A discussion then began about the schools recent PPR. The outcomes of the PPR were sent to students in advance of this meeting to read in case there were areas they wanted to speak about. The final report can be found here: <http://web.inf.ed.ac.uk/infweb/student-services/igs/postgraduate-programme-review>

After a brief overview of the outcomes the conversation was opened for any questions on this topic.

One question came regarding the following outcome, the question related to if there was any progress on this particular point:

The unfavourable comparison by staff and PhD students of the Edinburgh PhD to that of American competitors should be avoided as it appears to devalue the offering. The review team recommends that the Graduate School and Careers service work with students in recognising the value of their PhD work.

So far there are no concrete ideas to change a PhD length or to add taught courses. It was noted that American PhDs can include a period of work. Due to COVID-19 a number of the outcomes from the PPR may have to be put on hold before any actions can begin.

- IGS gave a brief overview of the current plans for the building and office re-entry. Unfortunately a lot of the plans that affect PGR students are not finalised at the time of the meeting. All plans will be communicated with all PGRs as soon as is possible. After the initial discussion there was an opportunity for questions relating to the building.

Q – Will there be further opportunities to collect personal items or equipment from the forum?

A – Although there will not be any further designated periods for collection of items special requests can be made. If a request is to be made then contact facilities@inf.ed.ac.uk and the school will try to accommodate this.

Q – What hours will the forum be open going forward?

A – Currently the opening hours for access are 9am – 5pm, Monday to Friday to approved persons only. Going forward these hours will be extended to accommodate more people returning to the space but because more intensive cleaning is required the building will not return to 24 hour access any time soon.

Q – When will PGRs and staff be able to return to the building on a more regular basis?

A – This decision will be based on Scottish government guidance. When a decision is made by the school it will be widely communicated but the schools guidance would still be if you can remain working from home and are happy to do this then this would be the recommendation.

- The floor was then open to a general Q & A:

Q – If I am working from home abroad am I allowed to purchase equipment using school funds to use in my home country?

A – All requests to purchase items are considered on a case by case basis. If you are abroad and would like to request equipment for your home this will be considered but you will be required to provide a very detailed request. Requests can be made to facilities@inf.ed.ac.uk

Q – What equipment can be requested for home working?

A – Similar to the last answer, all requests will be looked at individually. If you are unsure about whether or not an item can be requested please send an email to the facilities team and this can be considered.

Q – Has the schools stance on access for printing changed?

A – No. Students, unless given building access already, do not have access to the building for printing reasons. Printing Services continue to work remotely too so cannot help with any print requests at this time.

Q – If I need to confirm my attendance how do I do this?

A – IGS will contact students each month if they are due to confirm their attendance. Once IGS have been in touch please reply and we can confirm your attendance remotely based on receiving this reply.

Q – Will taught courses be running online only? Are the teaching support positions completely online too, or are there some tutorials/labs that happen on campus in person?

A - Some tutorials will happen on campus in person and some online. Any course which is to be held in person will be socially distanced and there will be significantly less people in every room to keep everyone safe and comfortable. Adaptions have been made to many teaching spaces to accommodate new social distancing guidelines.

Q – If I am currently abroad can I still apply for teaching roles or marking?

A – At the time of the meeting the answer to this question was not clear. IGS will seek to find an answer about this and ensure PGR students are sent guidance about this whether this comes from IGS or the Teaching Support team.

Thank you to everyone who attended and contributed to this session. IGS hope to have another Town Hall soon to provide further updates to students.