

Chemistry Postgraduate Committee: a student-run forum to facilitate student opinion and events

What did/do you do?

The Chemistry Postgraduate Committee is a student-run forum that serves to represent the opinions of PGR students within the School and to inspire community and academic development among the PGR cohort.

Who is involved?

The committee is composed of five postgraduate students who each represent a subject area within the School's provision (Research Labs/Physical, Inorganic, Nanoscience, MChem/MSc and Organic) in addition to a Chair and a Secretary. The Head of School, Technical Services Manager, Glassblowing Technician, and Postgraduate Administrator also attend committee meetings. All PGR students are invited to organised events, and attendance at these events regularly tops 25+.

How do you do it?

The Postgraduate Committee holds monthly meetings in which student concerns are voiced to the Head of School and other members of staff noted above. Each committee representative is responsible for bringing to the meeting any concerns raised within his or her subject area. Common agenda items include: PG Training, safety and housekeeping, PGR funding, website improvements, and event scheduling and organisation. Agendas and minutes from previous meetings are archived on the School's internal website.

Postgraduate committee members are democratically elected (if there is more than one person who wishes to take on the responsibility), and the position of chair is recruited from within existing committee members to ensure personal commitment to and knowledge of the position. Committee members are introduced to incoming students at induction, and the aims and events scheduling of the forum is explained at that time.

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Teaching and Learning Case Study

2011/12

David Molyneux
Chemistry (PhD student and Chair of Postgraduate Committee)

Coherent Curriculum themes:

- Student representation
- Student engagement
- Skills and employability

Chemistry Postgraduate Committee

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The Postgraduate Committee organises a series of events for the PGR community, including bi-monthly research lunches, Advanced Research Techniques Workshops, Careers Talks and, in 2012, a regional PGR conference. Research lunches provide an opportunity for PGR students to present work in progress and hone presentation skills in a welcoming and non-stressful environment (academic staff are prohibited from attending). School PGRDP credits are also awarded to participating students. A schedule of Careers Talks—which has included talks on patent law, entrepreneurship, forensic science, finance and teaching—stimulates discussion about PGR skills and development; previous talks and materials are available on the School's internal website.

Funding has been received from the RSC to provide free lunches to students at these events. The 2012 conference, sponsored by 8 industrial partners, hosted two guest speakers and four sessions with participants from York, Durham, Leeds and Manchester.

Why do you do it?

The committee was initially formed to handle a specific student concern: because instruments were being broken too often, the space was closed at 5 p.m. (too early for students who wished to continue their research into the evening). The students agreed to form a committee that would petition the Head of School for more equipment training to prevent breakages and enable the space to remain safely open.

Does it work?

The committee has run successfully for two years and is currently formalising member role descriptions for greater clarity and cohesion as it continues forward. Attendance at events is routinely quite high, and the committee has successfully received funding from the RSC and industrial partners for events.

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