

**Institute of Dentistry
Postgraduate Research Student Staff Liaison Committee**

Discussion about the current circumstances and issues regarding returning to the lab

8th July 2020

The purpose of this meeting was:

- To catch up on what the situation is since the laboratories re-opened, now that most students have returned.
- To provide an update on any new information on questions from the previous meeting.
- To ask any additional questions raised by the students.

Please see below the names and abbreviations of the meeting attendees for your reference in the Q&A.

Students Present:

Maher Rashwan Mohamed – PGR Lead, Dental Institute. (MRM)

Melissa Tiskaya – PGR, Mile End. (MT)

Najlae Boukbir – PGR, Blizard Institute. (NB)

Ahmed Naji – PGR, Dental Hospital. (AN)

Staff Present:

Mangala Patel – Senior Tutor, Student Support (Dentistry). (MP)

Aimee Kennedy – Research Manager. (AK)

Rebecca Hunter – Student Support Officer. (RH)

This meeting was chaired by Prof Mangala Patel and Maher Rashwan Mohamed.

1. Bench fees

Bench fee accounts are usually renewed at the end of July for everyone. An extension has not been permitted yet, so it is advised that students find creative ways to use the bench fees once agreed with their supervisors. We are still waiting for Zi Parker to let us know about an extension. MP has suggested that students ask supervisors if their Bench Fees allow for purchasing a laptop, which can be useful during the COVID situation. AK has stated to check funders terms and conditions as well as speak to the supervisor. MRM and NB have highlighted that students are not aware of how much money is in their bench fee account, and MP has suggested that students should ask their supervisor to send an email to the centre administrator to find out the balance. NB pointed out the frustration from students about the bench fees and this could affect the relationship with students and that there was no clarity. MT suggested using some bench fees on the lab if no extension is granted, as this could help to improve the lab facilities for all students. MT also mentioned that refunds were given from conferences that were cancelled due to COVID-19, and that there is even more money in the account than before the lockdown,

so this should be used. MP suggested that this will only work if the supervisor agrees. MRM pointed out that some supervisors may not be happy with this, and since the supervisors control the bench fees, and this should be sorted out with them. MP and AK have stated that the remaining money after the expiry date of the bench fees will be lost from the accounts and will probably be given to QMUL (not IoD or supervisors accounts). MRM has suggested that all student reps send an email to the students, advising them to contact their supervisor on how much money is in their bench fee account. MT said that giving ideas on what to spend the money on (e.g: pH meters, electrodes, etc) will help the students to think of ways to use the money.

2. Tuition Fees

NB said that students are worried and stressed because they are unaware about the situation for extensions and whether these extensions will need to be paid for by students. AK mentioned that there was an email sent around last week for funding information for extensions, and that more information can be found on the doctoral college website.

3. Situation in the labs post lockdown

- Blizzard (NB) – most students have returned; some are on interruption. The return is going smoothly, but safety is an issue. Only one bacteria gel in the department at the entrance and there is a one-way system. There is no extra safety equipment in comparison to before COVID-19. Everyone is sitting near each other at their desks right now, and it does not feel safe, especially when more students start to return at the end of August/beginning of September it will be a bigger issue. Plastic separation was suggested by NB to help the situation. MP said that the lab manager should be contacted about these concerns. This will be raised by MRM in the graduate studies committee meeting.
- DPSU (MT) – there is a one-way system, and many antibacterial gels present in the department. It was easier to maintain a distance between desks in the PhD office, but there may be an issue for some seats. Therefore, supervisors have offered to give their office to their students, and empty rooms can be used to ensure social distancing. Lab Agenda is also being used as a scheduling tool to ensure no more than 8 people book the PhD office at the same time, and if a student recognises that there are 8 people booked, they must book another day. Lab Agenda is also being used to book instruments and lab spaces. All students are having inductions, and signing in when they enter the department, and must disinfect the pens used. There are currently no face masks, due to the high demand and delay in deliveries.
- Dental Hospital (AN) – Not much research is being done in the clinic, and there are only 11 rooms in which aerosol generating procedures can be carried out, which the students do not currently have access to yet. Students cannot see patients if they require aerosol generating procedures. Inductions, fit-testing for face masks and antibody tests for COVID-19 are being done. Non-clinical students are mainly working from home, and if they need access, they contact their supervisors and it is then arranged. AN suggested that a collaboration between clinical students and NHS will be good, so that students can benefit from clinical activity in the university. This will be raised by MRM in the graduate studies committee meeting.

4. Interruptions/Extensions:

AN has attended a Q&A session for PhD students and someone has asked what the situation will be with childcare. The response by Zi Parker and the head of the doctoral college was that the students that cannot work due to childcare should apply for an interruption. AN suggested that an interruption is a last-resort scenario and he does not think that this response was empathetic. MP suggested that an extension may be a better solution. AK clarified that an extension means that the PhD was submitted late, which can look bad for the university and funders. RH suggested to discuss this with the supervisor and that students should not feel pushed to apply for an interruption. Further information was sent via email by AK about extensions and interruptions to us.

5. Interruptions/Extensions:

RH said that PGR support meetings were not successful before due to lack of attendance, but a poll will be sent out to see if students would like this to be started again. This will be done on zoom if it is started again.