



PDS Executive Committee

Minutes of the Meeting

24 April 2020

Microsoft Teams

14:00 – 16:00

Running themes of the meeting

- Feedback of running projects
- Connecting the departmental representatives
- Expanding the PDS community

Minutes of the Meeting

PDS Exec Meeting

14:00 – 15:00

1. **Welcome:** PDS Exec Chairperson, Tando Maduna, welcomed everyone to the meeting.
2. **Absent and Apologies:** Mzingaye (sent apologies via email).
3. **In attendance...**
 - a. Maaike, Kim, Tando, Marguerite, Vikas, Wiets, Natasha, Martina.
*Martina and Marguerite agreed to jointly compile minutes for the meeting.
4. **Overview of Agenda by chairperson** (quick overview and agenda items were confirmed). Tando suggested moving social discussion to Departmental Representative meeting rather than Exec meeting due to time limitations.
5. **AOB – any additions for AOB?** Exec members were reminded to submit matters prior to the meeting.
 - a. **Personnel** – 1) Resignation from the Exec of Mzingaye Xaba due to personal obligations and reasons 2) The possibility of an External worker to be part of the PDS Exec membership were added under AOB, point 14, of the agenda as Wiets is no longer a postdoc and is a member of staff. He expressed interest in continuing his participation, which would be discussed later on.
 - b. **Feedback from DRD/Natasha:** Natasha gave feedback on postdoctoral payment and SARS related matters – tax exemption process is currently in review and there will be a motion to review the tax implications (30 June) and setting up minimum payment cap as well as minimum tax bracket. One of the major concerns is that the Human Resources Division (HR) do not want to work with tax exemption and cannot handle any grievances because postdocs are not staff, whilst the Postgraduate Office (PGO) cannot handle postdocs because they are not students. Natasha has also been in contact with UCT, UJ and UP to determine how they handle postdocs and what benefits postdocs have. If postdocs

pay tax, they can be given contract status. Natasha also asked for feedback and said that it is important to ask all postdocs how they would feel about such a payment scheme with tax implications? Grievance procedure should be clarified (HR vs PGO). Tax considerations should be clarified to postdocs – for example, how do other universities handle similar issues? Contract status of postdocs in the University should be clarified. Natasha requests that we enquire from all postdocs what the general feeling is around a formal payment scheme with taxable income. Natasha highlights that there are postdocs that earn up to R2 million from industry, and suggested that the funding model should be re-evaluated where a minimum salary is specified that will be tax free. Any surplus amount will then be taxed, which will potentially allow postdocs to be handled as contract staff. Natasha also said that the NRF is coming to the table for these discussions and a new model is being developed.

- Marguerite raised a question – fixed amounts are determined by funding organisations (Claude Leon, NRF). Which amount will be taxed?

- Natasha responded: the entire funding model should ideally be revised to reflect a tax bracket (which is currently not the case with postdoctoral scholarships). Natasha stressed that idea is not to have the minimum postdoc salary (e.g. R200 000) taxed as this would leave postdocs with very little income.

- Kim noted that the minimum scholarship of R200 000 is too low to be taxable. Additionally, if postdocs are going to be taxed then SU [“an employer”] are also responsible for managing ‘an employee’, which seems difficult to formalise under these conditions. Natasha responded that postdocs should earn about R400 000.

- Martina noted on the Teams chat: “Thanks, Natasha. This is a very important issue that we should perhaps explore and discuss in more detail at a future meeting (for sake of time constraints today). We could also set up a survey to ask postdocs how they feel about this?”

- Tando confirmed that the postdoc contracts and tax implications should be clarified through a formal consultation process with the PDS community. We will set up a separate meeting to discuss this with the PDS community in more detail.

- c. **The AOB additions above necessitated amendments to the current agenda:** Due to time constraints it was agreed that point 13 (Socials) will be moved to the next meeting with Dept Reps.
- 6. ***Revision of minutes from 21 February 2020:** Martina suggested certain amendments to the minutes of the meeting on 21 Feb (confidential information detailing reasons for resignations should not be captured by the minutes, and not shared with PDS community if that is to happen). Martina shared the suggested amendments and edits for the minutes of 21 February on Teams/[PDS Exec Meeting last Friday \(24 April\)](#).
 - a. Accept or amend? There was no final resolution and the point will be discussed further via email and prioritised at a next meeting (due to time constraints - today's meeting is 1 hour).
- 7. **Departmental representatives (Maaïke and Tando):** see prepared agenda overleaf (the Exec agreed to adhere to the planned agenda).
- 8. **Letter of Appreciation** for resigned PDS Exec members; Tando thanked Martina for her big role in drafting the letter of appreciation, which will be sent to past members by Prof Cloete shortly. Natasha confirmed that the letter is currently at the DRD and Prof Cloete will sign it shortly.
- 9. ***PDS Secretary (Tando)**
 - a. Preparation of minutes in the meantime (short-term solution: possibly Communications and/or Vice-Chairs?): Tando mentioned that Priscilla is currently in Zimbabwe and will discuss a way forward with Natasha, as well as Priscilla. Maaïke is temporarily fulfilling this role, as well as Martina and Marguerite who assisted with keeping minutes for the last two meetings.
 - b. Publishing minutes to the PDS and website: This point was not discussed and will be prioritised in another meeting to plan the best way forward.
 - c. Re-advertise for Secretary (perhaps internally to Dep Reps)? This point was not discussed and will be prioritised in another meeting to plan the best way forward.
- 10. **Communications (Maaïke):** no major points were discussed.
- 11. ***Website update (Vikas)**
 - a. Presentation of current frame

- b. Comments and feedback from exec
- c. Set deadline for publication

12. *Outreach (Kim and Martina)

- a. Feedback on cost point
- b. Feedback on other possibilities

13. **Socials (Wiets)

- a. Podcast
- b. First PDS meeting on Teams
- c. Upcoming online social (brainstorm for ideas)

14. *AOB...

- a. Personnel: Resignation of Mzingaye Xaba noted via email. He added that he is leaving the PDS exec for personal reasons.
- b. External worker status and PDS Exec membership: Wiets' registration at SU is no longer as a 'postdoc' but rather an 'external worker'.
 - Martina noted on Teams chat that she is registered as an external worker since March 2020.
 - Natasha mentioned that she has no problem with Wiets remaining as a member of the Exec. On Teams chat Natasha additionally noted: we have had 2 postdocs in the exec before who were waiting for their funds to come in and to start a new project, so this has happened before. Maaïke and Vikas also noted that they would like Wiets to stay on the Exec.
 - Tando suggested that the Exec should also consult the PDS Constitution for clarity in this regard.
 - There was general agreement by members of the committee that Wiets may remain as member of the Exec.
- c. Recording of meetings via Teams platform was briefly mentioned but not discussed among members of the committee – no resolution/to be discussed in another meeting.

***Due to time constraints points 9, 11, 12 and 14 were not discussed in detail and will be prioritised at the next meeting of the PDS Exec.**

****Point 13 (Socials – Wiets) was discussed in the meeting with the Dept Reps – see overleaf.**

Natasha requested on the Teams chat that she would like to be invited and present at the meetings [with Dept Reps], she will also ask Izel and Lee-Anne to join one meeting [to be introduced to postdocs].

Maaïke subsequently invited Natasha to the Dept Rep Teams meeting platform that will follow.

The PDS Exec meeting ended at 14:56 and will now continue with the Dept Reps on another Teams platform (see overleaf).

(...Meeting continued)

PDS Exec Meeting with Departmental Representatives

15:00 – 16:00

1. Welcome of Departmental Representatives: PDS Exec Chairperson, Tando Maduna, welcomed Departmental Representatives to the meeting.

2. Overview of agenda

3. AOB?

4. Presentation of Exec members to the Representatives

1. Tando, Marguerite, Martina, Maaiké, Wiets, Vikas, Kim.

5. Introduction of each departmental representative:

1. Lovemore Kunorozva: UCT graduate, Medical and Health Sciences, 2nd year postdoc with an interest in the molecular basis of exercise and he is keen to support the PDS.
2. James Brown: PhD in Sport Science, 3rd year as postdoc at Institute of Sport and Exercise Medicine (ISEM) within Faculty of Medicine, investigating concussion in sport. James mentioned that they are exclusively postdocs in their Centre/Dept, and is very happy to be involved as a representative.
3. Liske Kotze: effects of different diets (Medical and Health Sciences; same division/department as Marguerite).
4. Daniel Nickelsen: SU postdoc for the past 3yrs, AIMS, previous Exec member and Chairperson. He has been involved with the PDS Exec since 2016 and is currently providing support as a passive member of the Exec.

6. Feedback from representatives

1. **Issues raised per department:** 1) Daniel: Few postdocs are aware of Exec and PDS in general and are also not on all the relevant mailing lists (thus email communication remains an issue). Dept Representatives are good to create a link between the PDS and DRD which should ideally facilitate communication and stimulate conversation between SU, DRD and Departmental/Centre postdocs. Daniel suggested that the PDS Exec can use Dept Reps to discuss issues, and by doing so serve as a direct link between the DRD, the PDS as a whole and the PDS Exec.

2. **Issues raised per department:** 2) Lovemore asked whether all postdocs are on the mailing lists and whether this information can be gathered. Liske also raised two points/issues – i) a communications and emails are not received, and asked specifically which mailing lists are for postdocs? Also, (ii) it would be good to summarise emails in one summary email and send to postdocs (once or twice weekly)?

Responses to the Issues raised per department:

- Tando responded in answer to both Lovemore and Liske's question regarding communication and said that the information is collated by the DRD (Asima is the responsible person) into a single mailing list. She also asked the representatives to advise anyone that they might know of, that are not on the mailing lists to communicate with each other and send a mail to the 'sympa' email to be added to the mailing list.

- Natasha also responded and added that the DRD has different clusters and accordingly different emailing lists namely the ECR (Early Career Researchers), capacity development and the DRD mailing lists which includes academic staff and postdocs who serve on certain committees or are involved in some other way with the DRD. Those emails are not necessarily sent to all postdocs. However, all postdocs should be on the postdoc mailing list. They are currently improving the mailing list by immediately adding a postdoc when they register, but this is sometimes complicated when a postdoc does not use their university email address. The DRD also tries to avoid the duplication of information. Some information first needs to be tailored prior to being sent to the whole PDS and Natasha first does this to include info that is postdoc specific and relevant. She is also in constant communication with the rector and Prof Cloete to advise on the way forward (during the COVID-19 pandemic) for both postgraduates and postdocs.

- Tando also added that the PDS receives emails from the DRD and committees, and asked that these are then distributed. She suggested to the reps that one person should oversee emails, to sift and modify information that is specific to postdocs. In order to streamline this, she suggested that the reps set up their own space in which to assemble this information, as well as identify issues that needs to be discussed. The reps

can also email postdocs@sun.ac.za, or sympa@sympa.sun.ac.za with the subject: "subscribe postdocs_drd@sympa.sun.ac.za" (added in comments).

- Maaiké also raised the possibility of creating a newsletter in response to Liske's question about collating all the emails into a weekly email containing all the relevant information, and suggests that this could be a good way to bundle information from the DRD, and potentially the PDS into a single email. Natasha responded and said that she is gathering a lot of info for the newsletter including rules, opportunities and funding calls and will communicate this with the PDS exec.

- Liske asked about information regarding returning to campus in light of COVID-19 and the national lockdown. Tando responded asking for patience on this point as Stellenbosch University is expecting to receive updated information from national government. The relevant information and procedures will be assembled and communicated by the University and PDS in due course.

- Martina added in the comments that university related COVID-19 info can be obtained from <http://www.sun.ac.za/english/covid-19-coronavirus-disease-2019>, and Natasha also said that we should get feedback from the rectorate in the first week of May.

- At this point, Natasha also posed the question to the reps on whether they sit in on divisional/departmental staff meetings: For Dept of Conservation Ecology the Dept Rep (Julia van Schalkwyk) sits on the meetings, for Division of Medical Physiology all postdocs sit in, for Biochemistry there are not any reps (hence no one attends staff meetings), and Vikas added in the comments that new representatives may contact him on WhatsApp. +27 83 362 6043. James and Lovemore sit in Staff meetings for ISEM (Institute of Sport and Exercise Medicine), but not for the division (Orthopaedic Surgery) or Department (Surgical Sciences) that they fall under. However, it should be noted that ISEM only has Postdocs (n=5) and Research assistants (n=2) and no other forms of 'staff' besides the Director of ISEM, who is a full Professor.

7. Discussion to structure future meetings between PDS Exec and Dept. Representatives

1. Structure of meetings and manager of the agenda

The suggestion was made that there should be a meeting between the PDS Exec and Reps every 2 months.

- Daniel adds that the PDS hasn't had reps previously but that there were monthly meetings that were open for all postdocs and suggests a meeting every 2 months, suggestion that it would be sufficient.
- James then asks the Exec how often they would like to meet, and also supported the suggestion of once every 2 months.
- The general agreement is that the PDS and exec meets once every 2 months, and Tando said that the exec will have the agenda for the meetings available beforehand. She also asked the reps to prepare their own agenda, and then asked whether the rep should be integrated with the exec meeting.
- James suggested that, from an efficiency point of view, it would make sense to integrate the meetings.
- Wiets will set up the calendar with the relevant meeting dates and times.

2. Frequency and duration of meetings

- Tando asked that meetings be extended to 2 hours with the reps to give enough time to discuss the agenda and relevant points.

8. Events/socials

1. **In lockdown time and after:** Podcasts, Webinars – from the Exec side Maaïke and Wiets to develop and discuss this idea soon. Dept Reps can also provide suggestions for this.
- Maaïke reported back on how to engage with postdocs during lockdown, and says that the idea of podcasts are currently being developed, but do still require suggestions and topics for this, including themes like working productively from home with children as well as other current issues during lockdown. She also indicates that it could include interviewing postdocs about their work, mentorship and research, and asked the reps who have ideas with regards to this to contact her. Wiets then highlights the technical aspects around this such as video and audio and receives suggestions in the commentary such as google meets, Iteam, hangouts as options to address this. Vikas mentions in comments that Zoom has security issues and suggests rather using other platforms.

- Natasha suggests in the comments that she can organise Prof Doug Rawlings to give a webinar on mentorship, and Prof Cloete on Advancing your academic career outside of academia (Natasha noted: He [Prof Cloete] calls it “Lateral thinking”).

9. AOB... Other matter arising?

- Tando asked if there are any other problems or issues from the reps and their departments’ side that they would like to address.
- James responded saying that on the positive side of being a postdoc , his environment and being a postdoc is incredibly flexible, and he has the opportunity to teach and supervise which makes it a very nice academic position. However, postdocs are still not treated as staff members, for example not being able to attend a DRD writing retreat which is exclusively for staff members. There are also administrative issues such as parking, but this has been sorted out by Bronwyn.
- Natasha responds that at Stellenbosch, postdocs are allowed to participate in Early Career Academic Development (ECAD) programs. This wasn’t always the case, and was not readily accessible, meaning that postdocs could not apply to participate in such events. However, both Natasha and Fadwah were going to put up a calendar of workshops for the year with dates and a link with which you can then sign up, dependent on the capacity of the workshop. Unfortunately, not being included in these workshops means that postdocs are missing out on important career development, and that is why Natasha is including postdocs. Once there is feedback re COVID-19 and the lockdown, Natasha will send out more details on events for the remainder of the year.

10. Suggestions for next meeting: Wiets will send out invites for the next meeting, and Tando said that she hopes the reps will have a structure set up by then from which to work, and then also asked that meetings are extended to 2 hours to give the reps opportunity to address issues.

11. Closing... Meeting concluded at 16:18 pm.