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Now that the 2021/22 academic year is under way this presents a great opportunity to get involved with the PGR community within your department, school and the wider university as a PGR Academic Rep. I have been a PGR rep for the past 2 years in the Department of Earth Sciences and have seen great steps forward being taken by the Doctoral School and the SU, particularly over the last year, to improve the effectiveness and benefit to PGRs of PGR reps. That being said, there is still plenty of work to be done to achieve the best results out of the academic rep scheme and this requires more students to step up and volunteer!

As a PGR rep you will have the opportunity to attend meetings between your school PGR leads and other PGR reps as well as the Doctoral School Forum. These meetings present the opportunity to develop a variety of skills, particularly in communication through chairing, group discussions and feeding back to your peers. As well as being a good CV booster, the topics raised in these meetings allow you to contribute towards changes which have a direct bearing on PGR life at RHUL. The members of staff present in these meetings, which typically happen once a term, are exactly those who can facilitate changes which the PGR student body advocate for. Taking on the role of a PGR rep is one of the best ways in which you can represent your peers and take steps to make changes to benefit us all.

To give you an idea of what PGR reps have been involved in over the past year, here are a few examples. Reps sitting on the PGR Forum had direct input towards the college response to COVID-19 for PGR students. The phase 2 extensions plan was discussed with us to gauge opinions prior to announcement and any feedback from students was fed straight back to the Doctoral School through PGR reps. Other issues regarding late stipend payments, the clarity of the Doctoral School website and newsletters and how the Doctoral School manages annual review and upgrade meetings were also addressed through PGR reps to try and improve the PGR experience for everyone.

I hope that this gives you an idea of the value that PGR academic reps can have within the PGR community. If you would like to be involved by representing your peers, helping to make changes for the benefit of PGR students whilst building your CV for just a couple of hours per term then please consider volunteering this year. The PGR rep scheme is in the process of lots of changes and improvements and the best way to ensure it works is for people to volunteer no matter where you are in your degree.