

**Minutes of the meeting of the Researcher Experience Committee
held on Tuesday 17 May 2016 at 2pm
in the Hodgson Room, Weir Building, King's Buildings**

- Present:** Professor Jeremy Bradshaw (Convener), Assistant Principal
Researcher Development
Dr Fiona Philippi (Vice-Convener), Acting Head of Researcher
Development, Institute for Academic Development (IAD)
Professor Richard Coyne, Dean of Postgraduate Studies, College of
Humanities and Social Sciences (CHSS)
Professor Philippa Saunders, Dean of Postgraduate Research, College
of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine (CMVM)
Dr Antony Maciocia, Dean of Students, College of Science &
Engineering (CSE)
Mr Tom Ward, Director of Academic Services (University Secretary's
representative)
Ms Julia Ferguson, College of Science & Engineering (CSE)
Ms Shelagh Green, Director of Careers Service
Dr Paddy Hadoke, Centre for Cardiovascular Science
Ms Jane Johnston, Head of Postgraduate Recruitment, Student
Recruitment & Admissions (SRA)
Ms Pauline Jones, Head of Strategic Performance & Research Policy,
Governance and Strategic Planning (GaSP)
Ms Susan Hunter, Academic Services (Secretary)
- Attending:** Professor Konstantin Kamenev, School of Engineering
Ms Ruth McCallum, Senior Business Analyst, Student Systems (items
4, 5 and 6)
Ms Lana Smith, Business Analyst, Student Systems (items 4, 5, and 6)
- Apologies:** Ms Tanya Lubicz-Nawrocka, EUSA Staff PGR Representative
Mr William Clayton, Postgraduate Convener, EUSA
Ms Zoe Lewandoski, Director of Human Resources
Ms Nichola Kett, Head of Enhancement Team, Academic Services
Ms Nataliya Muzyka, Postgraduate Research Student Rep (CHSS)
Ms Imogen Wilson, Vice President Academic Affairs, EUSA

1. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

2. Matters Arising

2.1 Leave of absence implementation

The Director of Academic Services reported that, following consultation with Student Systems' UKVI operations manager, a change was being made to this regulation. The change is not substantive but may increase the administrative burden on Schools. The revised regulation

is with Curriculum and Student Progression Committee for approval and will then be submitted to Senate and Court.

Academic Services will provide further guidance on leave of absence recording.

2.2 What is an Edinburgh PhD: working group report

The meeting noted the paper and confirmed the actions to be taken forward by REC. It was noted that the proposed three years plus six months PhD model would need approval in the next regulations review. The committee confirmed that Higher Degrees would not be reviewed as part of this work.

REC members will be reminded to submit comments on the doctoral study web pages to the Secretary. The Head of Postgraduate Recruitment will liaise with Communications and Marketing on changes to the web content.

Action: Secretary

3. Convener's Communications

3.1 ELIR action plan

This item was deferred for discussion under item 11 on the agenda.

3.2 Proposal for a new style of PhD Scholarship

The Convener reported on the paper, which had been approved by Principal's Strategy Group. A pilot will be held with selected Schools before the planned roll out of the scholarship from September 2017. The Convener will meet with Heads of College and Deans over the next few weeks to identify Schools to participate in the pilot.

FOR DISCUSSION

4. Postgraduate Research (PGR) Student Lifecycle Project

Student Systems representatives demonstrated the system developments incorporating enhanced postgraduate research student information within EUCLID. The project aims to draw College data currently held in the Postgraduate Programme Management Database (PPMD) and separate spreadsheet records into one place.

Administration by Colleges will continue but information will be visible to Schools. The systems will also allow concessions recording, and this will be available for all students, not only PGR. External supervisors will have restricted access to view only students attached to them.

The demonstration showed the steps through the assessment process. This will be a recording process, not electronic submission. It will include a record of external examiners but excluded the nomination of examiners process. External examiners will not have access to the system although this may be developed in future. Examiner report forms are not submitted through the system but submission dates are logged; this will allow reporting to show hold ups on the process.

Downloadable award letters will be available in the system and these will be editable locally.

Student Systems will carry out user testing and demonstrations for relevant School staff. The system is planned to go live in mid-August 2016.

REC endorsed this work as a welcome development and thanked Student Systems for their work on the project.

5. PGR student start dates

The committee noted the paper, which provided an evaluation of the impacts of having a firm first of the month start date, with particular focus on September, for postgraduate research students. During discussion the following themes emerged:

- First of the month programme start date is valid when it is important to the research, but not for the convenience of the School.
- The committee noted that funding and stipend start dates are administered by Schools.
- It also noted that system flexibility is possible, but this is not a trivial change and would require resourcing. The committee agreed that no system development would be undertaken in relation to start dates.

The committee confirmed that current practice for September of a system start date of first of the month, with students arriving in Welcome week. It also agreed that this is communicated to students in the offer letter. Arrival on first of the month for other months of the year to remain unchanged. There is existing provision for flexibility within University regulations to accommodate flexibility at the end of the programme of study if required.

Action: Director of Academic Services to communicate with CMA working group.

Action: Head of Postgraduate Recruitment to check with International Office on immigration requirements in relation to CAS and programme start dates.

6./

6. PGR Annual Progression Monitoring System

Professor Kamenev reported that the pilot had been successful and the system was working well. Consultation with PGR administrators has provided enhanced flexibility in the system to provide access for reviewers and Schools have implemented local solutions to assigning percentage supervision. Students also found the system was easy to use. There are plans for future enhancements to allow externals restricted access to the system to view only the students connected with them.

The meeting noted the paper from the School of Law, which had been provided as recommended by Quality Assurance Committee.

The meeting noted that annual review should be conducted by a panel meeting each year and that the system will help Schools to manage this.

It was also noted that IAD facilitate preparation for first year review sessions and CMVM host postdoc peer-supported review sessions.

REC also confirmed that as the system will be mandatory from September 2016, Schools should not use local annual review forms.

7. Tutors and demonstrators

The Convener reported that recent discussions had identified two strands of work in relation to tutors and demonstrators:

- Training and support
- Reward and conditions of employment

The training and support strand will be taken forward by REC. This will include a review of the Code of Practice on Tutoring and Demonstrating, and ensuring the Code is widely applied. REC will work with Human Resources (HR) in progressing this. The committee also recommended that students are involved in discussions.

HR will lead on the reward and conditions of employment strand, following the review of the Code of Practice on Tutoring and Demonstrating. However, it was noted that the policy decision on postgraduate research student working hours resides with REC. The committee also noted links to the new scholarship proposal under item 3.2.

8. Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2017 and beyond

The committee noted the paper and discussed the REC response in relation to questions 3, 4 and 5.

For question 3, there is a difference of understanding across disciplines on what is meant by engagement and this may be confused with public engagement.

For question 4, the committee considered that while gathering data on cohort training models is helpful, there is concern on the appropriate phrasing of questions to make it useful. There was also some uncertainty over how to students in cohort-based training models would be identified. Results would only be valuable if from unambiguously identified doctoral training partnership students.

The committee did not agree that there was any value to question 5.

Action: Secretary forward REC response to Surveys Team

9. Review of the Academic Year: impacts for PGR

The Director of Academic Services reported on the ongoing consultation, which continues until the end of May. Initial comments at the meeting included possible indirect impacts on students through impacts on staff; access to labs during Easter; opportunities for PhDs in Innovative Learning Week.

The committee was invited to submit comments on specific impacts for postgraduate research students to the Director of Academic Services.

Action: REC members to TW by Friday 27 May 2016

10. PGR Space: paper and recommendations for Space Enhancement Management Group (SEMG)

The committee noted the paper containing proposed recommendations for SEMG. It agreed the addition of secure storage space availability. The committee also agreed that emphasis should be made on the University's strategic plan for expanding postgraduate research numbers, which necessitates increased space availability. The amended paper will be circulated to College Deans for discussion in their respective Colleges, and comments would be fed back via the Secretary.

Action: Secretary circulate amended paper to College Deans

Action: Colleges provide comments to Secretary

It was noted that parallel discussions would need to be held locally on implementation and provision of space.

It was noted that the Director of Estates and Buildings is developing the Estates Plan and the paper would be fed into that discussion by the Head of Strategic Performance and Research Policy.

Action: PJ

The Convener will meet with the Director of Estates and Buildings for further discussion and report back to a future REC meeting.

Action: Convener

11. Postgraduate Research Experience Project: PREP

The Convener reported that the project bid will not go forward in the planning round. It is planned that some of the work identified in the project bid will be addressed through other work strands.

The Quality Assurance Committee has oversight of the ELIR response, and the Convener will feed into that in relation to postgraduate research matters.

12. PGR Special Circumstances

The Director of Academic Services reported that the special circumstances policy had been reviewed for 2016/17, however this only covers taught students. To address a lack of clarity in how special circumstances are handled for postgraduate research students, the paper proposes a statement for inclusion in the Code of Practice for Supervisors and Research Students.

The committee agreed that a more formal approach was not necessary. It also agreed that the statement, with amendments to include other sources of pastoral support, and including terminology from taught policy on what is not considered special circumstances, should be included in the Code of Practice for Supervisors and Research Students.

Action: Academic Services

13. Code of Practice for Supervisors and Research Students 2016

The committee noted the paper and discussed some minor amendments to annual progression review content, supervision models and the diagram of the standard three-year PhD model. Subject to amendments, which will be emailed to the Secretary, the Code was approved for publication.

Action: REC members to email comments to Secretary by Friday 27 May 2016

14. Handbook for External Examining of Research Degrees

The committee noted the paper and approved the handbook for publication subject to comments from REC members.

Action: REC members to email comments to Secretary by Friday 27 May 2016

15. Committee membership

The Convener thanked all committee members for their participation throughout the year, particularly co-opted members who were coming to the end of their term of membership.

Senate committee membership, including co-opted membership, will be reviewed across the four Senate committee at Learning and Teaching Policy Group. This will inform decisions on REC membership to ensure it has an appropriate balance of membership to take forward its business.

FOR INFORMATION

16. Enhancements to Supervisor Briefings

The committee noted the paper and recommended inclusions on the role of supervisors in recruitment and induction events, and legal liability. It was noted that Student Recruitment and Admissions run a training module on legal liability, which could feed, into the supervisor briefings.

Action: Secretary communicate to Vice-Convener

17. Knowledge Strategy Committee report

The committee noted the paper. The Convener reported that flexible and distance PhDs would be discussed at the next Knowledge Strategy Committee.

18. Research Policy Group report

A report will be available for the next REC meeting.

19. Enhancement Themes update

The resilience networking lunch takes place on 22 June in Paterson's Land, Holyrood campus. It provides an opportunity to share practice and help identify possible pilot activity to help students develop resilience. Postgraduate research input would be welcomed and details are available from Nichola.Kett@ed.ac.uk.

20. Senate Committee Planning

The committee noted the paper and that issues will be identified earlier in the year to feed into the committee planning process.

21. Any other business

21.1 Conferences and events

21.1.1 UKCGE: meeting the needs of distance doctoral students

The Dean of Postgraduate Studies (CHSS) reported on an interesting seminar which included discussion on cohort building, home distance students, supervising at distance and student visits to campus. University of Birmingham had provided key presentations.

21.1.2 Russell Group: PGR Special Interest Group Meeting

This item was deferred.

21.1.3 Universitas 21 DDoGS Meeting

The U21 Deans and Directors of Graduate Schools meeting at University of Maryland included an item from University of Birmingham on their distance learning PhDs.

21.1.4 UKCGE: Supervising and Assessing Interdisciplinary Doctorates, 17 June 2016, Edinburgh

Any members attending this event were invited to report back to REC.

21.2 Distance PhD

The Dean of Research (CMVM) reported that dedicated support groups had been established within the College. A survey of students had shown enthusiasm for distance PhD study, but confusion on how it would work.

22. Dates of 2016/17 meetings:

27 September 2016

15 November 2016

17 January 2017

14 March 2017

16 May 2017

Venues to be confirmed.

Susan Hunter

20 May 2016