

The University of Edinburgh  
Internal Periodic Review - 14-week response report

**Internal Periodic Review:** School of Engineering PGR Programmes  
**Date of review:** 5-6<sup>th</sup> February 2024  
**Date of 14-week response:** 14<sup>th</sup> November 2024

The School/Subject Area is responsible for reporting on progress with all recommendations, including those remitted to other areas of the University for action. If any recommendation has been fully addressed please record the action taken and date completed. Any barriers to progress should be highlighted on this report.

Priority	Recommendation	Timescale for completion	Comment on progress towards completion and/or identify barriers to completion	Completion date
1	The review team recommended that the School continue work to understand the circumstances and needs of the research student population, to target support and enhance provision to improve the overall student experience.	None Specified	<p>Two new Deputy Head of the Graduate School (DHoGS) roles have been created to help ensure that the PGR cohort is suitably provided for. Dr Lucia Bandiera, DHoGS (PGR Experience) has been tasked with working with the PGR cohort to understand their needs and to help ensure that the appropriate support is available. Dr Daniel Orejon, DHoGS (PGR Progression) has been tasked with ensuring that the supervisory practices within the School are consistently maintained at a high standard.</p> <p>With regard to Widening Participation, we are trialling a scheme within the IDCORE CDT (<a href="https://www.idcore.ac.uk/information-applicants">https://www.idcore.ac.uk/information-applicants</a>) in which applicants applying for 2025/26 entry, who self-identify as coming from a group who are typically under-represented on Engineering PGR programmes, can access a pre-application mentoring scheme. This will pair them with an existing or recently graduated member of the PGR cohort at Edinburgh, who will be able to provide helpful insights into the requirements of the application process, including how to prepare a research plan. The mentors will also be able to share their experiences of life as a PGR student within the School of Engineering. The intention is then to expand the scheme to applicants of all our PGR programmes.</p> <p>With regard to more general student wellbeing concerns, a staff workshop is being arranged to review the School's wellbeing support, both for our PGR students and our frontline staff in the Graduate Office. Topics of discussion will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current procedures for wellbeing and mental health support;</li> </ul>	Ongoing

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other areas where support/provision may be lacking or could be improved;</li> <li>• Recording and escalation of concerning cases;</li> <li>• Signposting to students where to find help and advice;</li> <li>• Providing protection and support for staff dealing with concerning student cases.</li> </ul> <p>The UoE Director of Student Wellbeing, Andy Shanks will attend to provide his experience and expertise.</p>	
2	The review team recommended the School work with students to assess student communication and develop strategies to enhance student engagement. In particular, information about courses, training, events and seminars across the School should be easily accessible, in one space.	None Specified	<p>The Graduate Office is reviewing how other schools in the university provide information to their PGR programmes. In particular, in line with the review panel's suggestion, we will consider those schools (<i>e.g.</i> Chemistry) who use SharePoint as the primary PGR information repository. We have recently recruited a new Graduate School Administrator, who commenced work in mid-October. They were previously a Senior PGR Administrator in another College, where they successfully updated their students' handbook onto SharePoint.</p> <p>Once the best repository solution has been identified, they will be tasked with leading the transfer and/or update of all PGR information onto the selected software platform. If appropriate, a number of internships will be offered to PGR students to both mitigate the workload incurred in establishing the new resource and validating its enhanced accessibility.</p>	Ongoing
3	The review team recommended that the School and College work with staff and students to agree guidelines and expectations for working on campus, whilst leaving some flexibility to account for individual needs and circumstances.	None Specified	<p>In order to ensure that the School and College comply with the university's commitment to enabling, promoting and encouraging staff and student wellbeing, we wish to avoid pushing guidelines and expectations on the PGR cohort related to working on campus. The School and College already strongly recommend regular on-campus attendance to PGR students, and these efforts will be redoubled to highlight the benefits of in-person engagement on work efficacy and wellbeing.</p> <p>In June 2024, the College PGR Committee (CPRC – of which the SoE HoGS is the Deputy Convener) confirmed its Strategic Priorities for the 2024/25 academic period, which includes "<i>increase PGR student attendance and engagement with on-campus teaching, research and social activities</i>". More will be done to promote a sense of belonging amongst PGR students through in-person network, cohort and community building initiatives. This will</p>	Ongoing

			<p>include providing support for cross-School engagement and building interdisciplinary cohorts.</p> <p>It is also hoped that clearer information regarding the University's hybrid working policy (see response to Recommendation #4) and improvements in facilities on the KB campus (see response to Recommendation #11) will assist in achieving this goal. This is in line with another of the CPRC Strategic Priorities, "improve PGR students' working and social environments, including physical spaces and hybrid working".</p>	
4	The review team recommended that the School and College engage with students to plan for hybrid working within the campus environment.	None Specified	As covered in the response to Recommendation #3, the CPRC Strategic Priorities for 2024/25 include plans to improve PGR working environment, which incorporates hybrid working. The University introduced a Hybrid Workplace Policy for staff in summer 2023, and this will form the basis to develop guidelines for the CSE PGR cohort.	Ongoing
5	The review team recommended that the School dedicate a portion of funding for scholarships for Widening Participation students.	None Specified	<p>The School is in discussions with the Martingale Foundation (<a href="https://martingale.foundation/">https://martingale.foundation/</a>), who were founded to support PG students from the UK from underrepresented backgrounds, with fully funded scholarships and a support programme to overcome non-financial barriers. The foundation began their work in the field of Mathematics, with partner universities Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Edinburgh, ICL, KCL, Manchester, Oxford, QML and UCL. They are now planning to expand into Engineering and Data Science, and have approached the School of Engineering as a potential partner. Preliminary talks have been held to discuss how the partnership might function, and the goal would be to have annual cohorts of 2-3 students starting from academic year 2026/27. The Foundation oversees the selection process, which would ensure students fulfil the Widening Participation (WP) criteria.</p> <p>We are also investigating the best way to identify students from under-represented and/or non-traditional groups before or during the selection process (see the response to Recommendation #1), in order to provide them with additional support, and ring-fenced scholarship(s), where appropriate.</p>	Ongoing
6	The review team recommended that the School leverage the alumni resource for networking, careers and training needs.	None Specified	We are exploring the set-up of an advisory committee made up of external collaborators from industry, tasked with promoting exchange of best practice in equality, diversity and inclusion	Ongoing

			<p>between industry and academia. This would be composed, where possible, of alumni from our PGR programmes, and would have a similar make-up to the Industrial Liaison Boards that already exist for our UG programmes. The role of the committee would include helping identify ways that the competencies and employability of our PGR students can be enhanced, highlighting opportunities for research collaborations with industry, and partnering in our outreach and engagement activities within the local community (see the response to recommendation #9).</p> <p>Regarding additional training, Edinburgh Innovations currently provides training to academics, to help them identify opportunities and build partnerships that will allow the translation of their research to meet commercial needs. We are looking at adapting this material to support PGR students, as well as developing workshops and networking events with industry.</p> <p>We are also working with the University's Careers Service to develop a more integrated provision of careers advice, allowing students to consider their post-graduation options earlier, and hence make better use of the advice and facilities available within the University during the period of their studies.</p>	
7	The review team recommended that the School revisit and consider T&D policies regarding contract limitations, taking student finances into consideration.	None Specified	<p>PGR students can apply for contracts once they have completed the mandatory T&amp;D training in their first semester of study in line with current University and School policy. On a case-by-case basis, we are able to show some flexibility, such as when PhD students have undertaken the course during their undergraduate studies. Requests from students to undertake T&amp;D duties in their final months of study are also reviewed on a case-by-case basis, but the main priority of all students needs to be timely completion and submission of their PhD thesis. The situation is complicated by the recent request from the University to reduce our Other Operating Costs (OOC) by 7% so this will need to be taken into consideration. For the financial year 2023/2024 the T&amp;D spend for the School of Engineering was £617K. This is a 50% increase on the spend in 2021/2022.</p>	Ongoing
8	The review team recommended that the School continue to develop their in-house system to allow supervisors to track student T&D hours.	None Specified	<p>A new T&amp;D Steering group has been set up to deliver a clear, prioritised set of requirements to enable the delivery of a new T&amp;D system in academic year 2025/26. This will involve the purchasing of a new in-house system that will include a much better tracking of hours. The first meeting of this new group took place in August</p>	Ongoing

			2024, and dedicated resource is being provided from Information Services to support the initiative.	
9	The review team recommended that the School engage with existing outreach activities to enhance Widening Participation in PGR recruitment.	None Specified	We are investigating setting up the <i>Public Engagement Scholars</i> initiative, similar to a programme that has run for some time within the School of Chemistry. The proposal would have a cohort of (most likely 9-12) PhD students working alongside our Student Recruitment and Outreach Officer, Katie Grant to plan, develop and deliver outreach activities to the local community. This could include science fairs, pre-application summer schools, onsite and offsite, primary and secondary school events and engagement with our current UG cohort. It is proposed that the <i>scholars</i> would receive a three-month funded extension to their studies to compensate for the work done in these activities. We would plan to fund these extensions through support from industry and alumni, in line with the response to Recommendation #6.	Ongoing
10	The review team recommended that the School review amount of support to attend conferences.	None Specified	<p>The current amount each PGR student receives for research costs (bench fees) is £2,000, a figure that has not changed for a number of years. In 2020, there were plans to review the amount, but this did not take place due to the pandemic and the long period without in-person conferences. The School plans to review the figure in the coming months, but there are currently constraints on expenditure (as mentioned above in the response to Recommendation #7).</p> <p>To widen accessibility and encourage a growth mindset, a section of the newly established information repository (see the response to Recommendation #2) will collate travel scholarships opportunities for PGR students and contacts of mentors to support individual applications.</p>	Ongoing
11	The review team recommended that the School and College continue to liaise with staff, students, EUSA, Estates, and Accommodation, Catering and Events (ACE) to improve the availability and quality of catering, leisure and sports facilities on the KB campus.	None Specified	Decisions about the availability of facilities on the KB campus are mostly outwith the direct control of the College and the School. However, with the CSE PGR Dean and Head of CSE, we will continue to make improvements where we can and to engage with EUSA and the University management, and advocate for improvements in KB catering, leisure and sports facilities, through the Doctoral College and other available fora. In these ways, we have recently been able to ensure that facilities on the KB campus (including wellbeing services, catering outlets and sports facilities)	Ongoing

			remained open during the summer months of 2024, which would normally have been closed due to the absence of UG students.	
	Please report on steps taken to feedback to students on the outcomes of the review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The recommendations of the IPR review have been circulated to the PGR cohort, and the review report has been discussed with representatives of each of the School's seven research institutes at recent School Postgraduate Experience Committee (SPEC) meetings.</li> <li>• Information about the entire IPR process and all the relevant documentation (including the School's reflective report, the panel's Final report (with recommendations), and a copy of this response) are shortly to be included on the Graduate School Wiki pages, where they will be accessible by all staff and PGR students within the School.</li> </ul>		