

Internal Periodic Review of: School of Informatics (Postgraduate Research provision)

Date of review: 12 & 13 March 2020

Date of 14-week response: 1 September 2020

Date of year-on response: due 26 May 2021

The School 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.

Task owners are identified as:

HoGS – Head of Graduate School, **DHoGS** – Deputy Head of Graduate School, **IGS** – Informatics Graduate School Office staff, **ITO** – Informatics Teaching Organisation Staff, **COMMS** – Informatics Communications team, **DOI** – Directors of Institutes, **HoS** – Head of School, **DoPS** – Director of Professional Services, **DoSS** – Director of Student Support, **CS** – Computing Support

Recommendation no	Recommendation	Timescale for completion	Comment on progress towards completion and/or identify barriers to completion	Completion date
1	<p>School structure and organisation</p> <p>a) The research institutes have an important role in the School's structure; however there is a lack of consistency in processes across institutes. The review team recommends that the School's structure and organisation needs to keep pace with the increase in size. Further expansion should take into account the physical limitations of the building and avoid further impact on the student experience.</p> <p>b) The review team recommends the School take advantage of the strong institute structure and ensure consistency of provision across the institutes.</p> <p>c) The review team recommends that further support for professional services staff is needed, given the increasing complexity and volume of programmes and students.</p> <p>d) The review team recommends that the School gives consideration to the impact of increased growth on the Graduate School as part of the School's structure and organisation plans above</p>	<p>Aug 2020</p> <p>Covid-19 dependent</p> <p>Apr 2021</p>	<p>a,b) [HoS,DoPS] In response to the increasing size of the School, the senior management structures have been revised during AY 2019-20 and taking effect from 2020-21. The most relevant change is in the increase in responsibilities for Institute Directors and the introduction of specific responsibilities for the Deputy Head of School.</p> <p>a) [DopS,CS] In recent years the physical limitations of the Informatics buildings in respect of office accommodation for PGR students has been an ongoing consideration for the School. The School is aware that there is insufficient space to expand PGR numbers beyond 2020-21 levels, and consequently the Informatics Graduate School (IGS) planned a restructuring of the usage of our PGR offices alongside plans to move to a mobile (rather than tethered) computing infrastructure for PGR students to decouple desk facilities from students' personal computing facilities. This plan was stalled by the Covid-19 pandemic but is still expected to roll out from autumn 2020. Our plan is to not only ease the desk space issue but to improve student experience through a more up-to-date computing infrastructure that allows students greater freedom to choose their place of work.</p> <p>a) [DHoGS, IGS] We plan to review the issue of consistency in approach to PGR provision across</p>	<p>Aug 2020</p>

and works with current staff to identify ways forward.

e) Recruitment for CDTs is managed by the Graduate School, and the research institutes and centres manage their own postgraduate research recruitment. Currently there is a misalignment of deadlines for applications and therefore planning for space management is challenging. The review team **recommends** that the School consider alignment of recruitment processes and moving to two or three fixed intakes per year. The School and Graduate School should plan for limiting the number of intakes of students it operates in order to help balance workload in the Graduate School office. Furthermore, awareness of space resource needs to be carefully considered during the intake process.

institutes. While differences in approach are to be expected, given the diversity of programmes, we recognise the importance of consistent standards across institutes and PGR programmes, and the importance of clear communication to students regarding processes for their annual reviews. For example, there are differences in expectations on students in relation to annual reviews between institutes, and some institutes have a tradition of holding open review presentations whereas others hold closed meetings of a small panel. We therefore propose to review our processes for annual reviews across institutes and review our methods of communicating these processes to students on each programme. We will identify discrepancies and amend processes or explain the rationale behind valid programme-specific approaches where they differ from the norm. We will also augment the IGS web pages to make clear that different approaches are taken in different institutes.

July 2021

c,d) [DoSS] In response to the third and fourth sub-recommendations given the University's current financial position and the need to reduce staff-related costs, the School will be unable to invest in additional professional services resource. We will, however, review the Graduate School structures, identifying issues that prevent it from scaling or that could be achieved more efficiently in what is now a large organisation within the School. We will also continue to ask for additional resource as the School's financial situation improves.

July 2021

e) [IGS] In response to recommendation concerning two or three fixed intakes per year it is firstly noted that in practice we already have two main intake periods (Sept and Jan). The flexibility to start at other months of the year is often necessary, e.g. if funding is time limited. However, an issue was raised that needs to be reviewed. We will therefore examine the workload in the IGS office that is driven by multiple intakes, to determine how can this be minimized without constraining start dates.

Oct 2020

e) [HoGS,IGS] We plan to review our recruitment processes and consider how we can better align these between programmes, bearing in mind that programmes do sometimes need to recruit in ways that are specific to those programmes.

		Oct 2020	a,e) [HoGS, IGS] Although space resources are carefully taken into consideration already during the intake process and have been for some years, this year the challenge has been exacerbated by a gradual increase in space pressures combined with numerous student interruptions due to Covid-19. We anticipate that our recruitment processes from 2021-22 onwards will need to be “space aware” and will almost certainly require quotas for CDTs and Institute PGR programmes. This will be planned and communicated to relevant stakeholders across the School.	
2	The review team heard evidence from students that they have inconsistent experience of supervision. Consistency of milestones and expectations around progression is required, not least to help professional services staff support the student journey. The review team were concerned to hear evidence of unacceptable comments made by some academic staff to students for example ‘this institute offers success, money and women’. The review team recommends that supervisor training is enhanced. Induction of new supervisors is important, but ongoing supervisor training is needed in addition to the normal five-year cycle, particularly in areas such as diversity and respect. Cultural issues need to be addressed around gender, equality and diversity. It would also support the School’s remit item on supporting postgraduate research student mental and wellbeing if mental health training is included as part of a suite of supervisor training enhancements. Transparency on how issues are dealt with within the School must be increased and inappropriate behaviour must be dealt with. The School must ensure safe mechanisms for reporting inappropriate behaviour are in place and communicated clearly to students and staff. The School should explore alternative mechanisms so that students have greater confidence in the system and will not worry about retribution. The blacklisting of staff from supervision should be more transparent.	Sept 2021	a) [DHoGS] As long as resources allow, the School will continue to offer the “ <i>Don’t Cross the Line</i> ” course, encouraging academic staff to attend until there are enough delivery opportunities to make it compulsory for all supervisors.	Sept 2020
		Sept 2020	b) [HoGS,DHoGS] The School will introduce content, and refer students to further resources, on cultural diversity into the PGR induction programme.	
		Jan 2021	c) [HoGS] Completion of the “Challenging Unconscious Bias” and “Equality & Diversity Essentials” courses is already mandatory for all academic staff. The School will aim for 90% compliance, and make it a condition of recruitment of new PhD students.	
		Nov 2020	d) [DHoGS] We will review best practice in the College and the IAD for training the academic supervisors to deal with student mental health issues. We will promote the uptake of the Learn course “Supporting Students with Mental Health Problems: Charlie Waller Memorial Trust”	
		Jan 2021	e) [DHoGS] We will be transparent in explaining what appropriate behaviour in the research environment is. We will improve our support for resolving problems, and for supporting students wanting to make formal complaints, so that they can come forward with greater confidence.	
3	Enhancing the learning and research environment	January 2021	a) [DoPS] The building work that was planned for the summer to improve the air quality in the internal rooms within the Forum was delayed by the Covid-19 lockdown	

	<p>The review team commends the Building Manager and Senior Team for engaging with Estates Department to ensure building work to address issues in terms of heat and air quality. The review team recommends that efforts to move forward rapidly with this are supported by the College.</p> <p>The review team heard evidence from students that other clear and more transparent communications to students were needed. The review team recommends a “you said we did” approach, transparent communication on important issues (for example, air quality issues in the building) and involving students in planning (to take advantage of engaged and enthusiastic students).</p>	<p>Oct 2020</p>	<p>and, unfortunately, the scope of this work will now been reduced due to the University’s financial position. Estates are currently reviewing the required works to maximise what can be achieved within the available funds that have been committed by the College. Under the Covid-19 distancing rules, there will be fewer people in each room, improving temperatures and air quality.</p> <p>b) [DHoGS, COMMS] We will improve and expand our mechanisms for communicating between IGS and the PGR student community. We will continue the very successful PGR townhall meetings that were held during the Covid-19 lockdown, together with online updates from IGS following SSLC meetings. The IGS web page for sharing feedback based on “you said we did” will be updated.</p>	
<p>4</p>	<p>Supporting Postgraduate Research Mental Health and Wellbeing</p> <p>a) The review team recommends that student pastoral support is strengthened particularly for low-level issues, with better awareness of available support structures amongst staff and students.</p> <p>b) The review team recommends that the School provides appropriate funding and opportunities for students to take the lead in organising to self-support and build resilience, particularly around coping with failure.</p>	<p>Sept 2020</p> <p>Oct 2020</p>	<p>a) [DHoGS] We will work to improve the awareness amongst students of the support staff and roles. We have expanded our team of PGR Personal Tutors in AY 2020/21 who we anticipate taking on more active pastoral support roles including holding regular office hours.</p> <p>b) [DHoGS] The School will consider how best to deploy resources for on-course support of students including empowering them to take the lead in organising self-support. Options being considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal meeting sessions for PGRs to meet with PGR tutors at the start of their programme (or annually). • Set up drop-in sessions, or fixed times/office hours for PGR tutor consultations. • Regular reminders to students about the PGR tutors (e.g. at key times of the year) • Promote IAD courses to students. Options include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Managing your Work and your Goals ○ Seven Secrets of a Highly Successful Research Student ○ Beating Writers Block ○ Ease the Load - Feel Good About Your Busy Life ○ Imposter Syndrome and How to Deal with It ○ The Inner Game - Exploring Stress, Balance, Resilience and Self-Belief 	

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Staying Well (while social distancing) ○ Staying Well during your PhD ○ Working productively at a distance - working with your supervisor and time management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Circulate to staff and students information on how to recognise signs and symptoms of mental health issues. ● Enhance and promote student-facing IGS web pages linking to mental health support resources, including promoting the Student Counselling Service. ● Institutes to introduce a staff role with responsibility for PGR oversight. 	
5	<p>Provision of teaching support and management of teaching opportunities</p> <p>a) Final course moderation practices were not clear. The review team recommends that each course is clearly moderated by the Course Organiser in line with University and College guidance.</p> <p>b) The review team found that there was no underlying problem with students rejecting opportunities to teach and recommends that the School delivers teaching, including postgraduate support for teaching, within the available teaching resources and GTA resource budget, and that students are allowed freedom to pursue the teaching that interests them. Course Organisers should work with the Informatics Teaching Organisation to advertise teaching opportunities.</p> <p>c) The review team commends the good practice in tutor training and materials provided by Course Organisers in the larger courses for example, Machine Learning and Pattern Recognition (INFR11130). The review team recommends that the School consider ways this good practice can be shared with other Course Organisers.</p>	<p>January 2021</p> <p>Sept 2020</p> <p>Nov 2020</p> <p>Oct 2020</p>	<p>a) [ITO] Course Organisers/TAs already moderate coursework submissions. The School's Teaching organisation will review the way in which each course applies moderation to ensure processes are in line with University and College guidance.</p> <p>b) [ITO] The ITO will continue to advertise teaching support positions as proposed by the course organisers.</p> <p>c) [DHoGS] The School will review existing tutor training courses and circulate best practice with all Course Organisers. In the current year, a two-week IAD training is already underway for blended learning.</p> <p>c) [ITO] The School will consider other ways in which best practice in particular courses can be shared with other Course Organisers, including the regular Teaching Hour. Teaching Lunches to discuss support and training for tutors will be organised. The School is currently running training courses for tutors.</p>	
6	<p>Student voice</p>	<p>Sept 2020</p>	<p>a) [IGS] The School welcomes these recommendations for student-led shared values in terms of office etiquette. The Graduate School will review operation of the existing Staff</p>	

	<p>a) Students were aware of variable occupancy of postgraduate research student offices and the impact growth is having. There were also tensions around different expectations of office etiquette. The review team recommends the School supports students to develop a set of student-led, shared values, particularly in terms of office etiquette.</p> <p>b) The review team recommends that the School facilitate the formation of a student body that makes the most of the Institute representative system so that greater communication between students from institutes is achieved and opportunities for collaboration enhanced. This would also help address issues around acceptable behaviours.</p>	<p>Nov 2020</p> <p>Nov 2020</p> <p>Dec 2020</p>	<p>Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) and work to improve its effectiveness.</p> <p>a) [DHoGS] The Graduate School will consult with Institutes with a view to enhancing their role in improving office culture and in improving student representation.</p> <p>b) [IGS] The Graduate School will facilitate the formation of an Informatics PGR student group, based on the Institutes' PGR reps.</p> <p>a) The Informatics PGR student group will be asked to develop a guide to shared office etiquette.</p>	
7	<p>The review team recommends that the external member of the progression review panel is formally recognised by the School for the important role they play in the student experience and that the external, if at all possible, should be the same person for the duration of the PhD.</p>	<p>Sept 2020</p> <p>Sept 2020</p> <p>Sept 2020</p>	<p>[IGS] The School will locally record the external member of the review panel, although at present EUCLID has no way to record this information.</p> <p>[IGS,DHoGS] The Graduate School will follow the guidance to recommend that the external reviewer stays the same, where possible, for each student.</p> <p>[IGS,DHoGS]The Graduate School will update its induction materials and annual review guidelines to students to highlight the importance of the role of the external review panel member and clarify the functions of this role to all involved in the review process.</p>	
8	<p>The review team recommends that the School ensures that both students and staff are made better aware of the Postgraduate Research Personal Tutors, that awareness is assessed after a suitable period, and that Postgraduate Research Personal Tutor resource is increased to a level appropriate to the number of research students in the School.</p>	<p>Sept 2020</p>	<p>[IGS,DHoGS] The Graduate School will work to increase student awareness of PGR Personal Tutors and their role in providing pastoral support to PGR students. We have increased the number of the PGR Personal Tutors. We will also promote more widely the contacts for the tutors, and their office hours (e.g. at Induction and at Town Hall meetings, as well as web pages). We will set up an email rota to periodically remind the students about the Tutors.</p> <p>We note that the CDT programmes already have their own Pastoral Support contacts with discussion meetings and drop-in hours.</p>	
9	<p>The review team recommends that the Head of School and School Management Team ensures clarity for staff on financial routes and what can and</p>	<p>Complete</p>	<p>[DoPS] Changes to the University's financial model in recent years has changed the way College and Schools can fund equipment and capital projects of >£50k; these</p>	

	cannot be achieved. If particular operational difficulties are incurred, College should work with the School to resolve these.		capital investments now prioritisation at College level within budgets provided to Colleges. Improved forward planning is required at School level to plan equipment purchases and replacements, and our improved budgeting processes will support this. The School made some changes a year ago to restrict the ability for our Institutes to fund equipment purchases, which is being reversed from FY 2020/21 which will provide more flexibility for Institutes to support PGR student equipment needs.	
10	The unfavourable comparison by staff and PhD students of the Edinburgh PhD to that of American competitors should be avoided as it appears to devalue the offering. The review team recommends that the Graduate School and Careers service work with students in recognising the value of their PhD work.	Dec 2020 Jan 2021	[DHoGS] The School recognises that there are differences between UK and US PhD programmes, and each has some advantages and disadvantages. The Graduate School will work to promote the benefits of the shorter UK PhD programme to students, highlighting job prospects, transferable skills, etc. We will also promote the benefits of the full-time research position here versus the part-time teaching responsibility positions associated with US/EU PhD positions. This will include input from the Careers Service. We will include a section on the benefits of the UK PhD model relative to the US/EU PhD model in the supervisor training. [COMMS] The School will publicise, through its Communications and Outreach team, the impact of the research carried out by our PGR students, highlighting the strong publication record of students across the School and the contributions they make to society.	
	Please report on steps taken to feedback to students on the outcomes of the review	[IGS] This document will be posted on the new "You said / We did" web page.		
For Year on response only	Any examples of a positive change as a result of the review			