

**Minutes of the meeting of the Researcher Experience Committee
held on Tuesday 29 September 2015 at 2pm
in the Board Room, Chancellor's Building, Little France**

- Present: Professor Jeremy Bradshaw (Convener), Assistant Principal
Researcher Development
Professor Susan Hardman Moore, College of Humanities and Social
Science (CHSS)
Professor Sarah Howie, College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine
(CMVM)
Professor Kate Heal, College of Science and Engineering (CSCE)
Dr Adam Bunni, Academic Advice Co-ordinator, EUSA
Dr Fiona Philippi, Deputy Head of Researcher Development, Institute
for Academic Development (IAD)
Mr Tom Ward, Director of Academic Services (University Secretary's
representative)
Ms Nichola Kett, Head of Enhancement Team, Academic Services
Dr Dahlia Doughty Shenton, Institute of Genetics and Molecular
Medicine (Research Staff Society Rep)
Ms Julia Ferguson, College of Science & Engineering
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 Charlie Jeffery, Senior Vice Principal
Professor Konstantin Kamenev, School of Engineering
Mr Chris Jowett, School of Mathematics (for item 4)
- Apologies: Professor Richard Coyne, Dean of Postgraduate Studies (Research),
College of Humanities & Social Science (CHSS)
Professor Philippa Saunders, Dean Postgraduate Research, College of
Medicine & Veterinary Medicine (CMVM)
Professor Alan Murray, Dean of Students, College of Science &
Engineering (CSCE)
Ms Zoe Lewandoski, Director of Human Resources

1. Minutes of the previous meeting

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

2. Matters Arising

2.1 Electronic business

2.1.1 Higher Degree

The award of a DSc in the College of Science of Engineering was approved on 5 August 2015.

2.1.2 Regulatory Standards for Format and Binding of Thesis

An update to the guidance was agreed on 28 August 2015. A further paper on thesis publication and open access will be submitted to a future REC meeting.

2.2 Collaborative Provision Group update

The Director of Academic Services reported that guidance on joint PhD approval processes has been developed. Information is published on the collaborative provision wiki and launch events with Schools are planned during semester 1.

The meeting thanked Academic Services and Governance and Strategic Planning for their work to develop this guidance.

2.3 REC Vice-Convenor

The Convenor reported that Dr Fiona Philippi will act as Vice-Convenor while the recruitment process for Head of Researcher Development in IAD continues.

3. Convenor's Communications

3.1 Times Higher Education (THE) awards

The meeting noted that the University is short-listed for the Outstanding Support for Early Career Researchers award. Winners will be announced at the THE awards ceremony on 26 November 2015.

3.2 Postgraduate Research Mid-Semester Induction Events

The meeting noted that welcome events for postgraduate research students who were unable to attend in September, or who are joining throughout the year, are available to book online. Information from the Student Induction Team will be circulated to the Committee after this meeting.

Action: Secretary

3.3 Coimbra Group

The Convenor reported that he has been invited to Chair the Coimbra Doctoral Studies Group. This will provide an opportunity to lead the agenda setting.

FOR DISCUSSION

4. Space Engagement Management Group: postgraduate research space pilot

Mr Jowett reported for the School of Mathematics and Professor Hardman Moore reported for the School of Divinity on the pilot project to repurpose teaching rooms as postgraduate space.

Images of what had been developed in the School of Mathematics were made available to the meeting. The School had felt a lack of control over the pilot and that there had been little consultation with students. They also felt that their comments on the design plans had not been implemented. The development of private space in multi-occupancy rooms has been relatively well received, however some design elements have been less well received.

The School of Mathematics also reported on a previous project to develop the Undergraduate Maths Hub which was outsourced. The School felt that more consultation with students on this project had resulted in more positive feedback and, they believe, has impacted on School NSS results.

The School of Divinity, which has existing postgraduate research space, used the project to develop dedicated hot-desking space for postgraduate taught (PGT) students. There are close ties between PGT and research students in the School, with PGT converting to postgraduate research study. The project also resulted in another room being available for booking by postgraduate research students. There has been low use of hot-desking space since project completion in November 2014, however increased use is indicated this year.

The Committee thanked Divinity and Mathematics for their input.

The Committee considered that it was encouraging to see different approaches being tried. It also noted that increased pressure on teaching space may impact future development.

The Committee will feedback on this discussion to Space Enhancement Management Group and request an update on future plans for this project.

Action: Convener/Secretary

5. Postgraduate Research Experience Project (PREP)

The meeting welcomed Professor Kamenev who is seconded to the IAD to work on PREP. He updated the meeting on the first priority which is to resubmit the project bid. Meetings are planned with Heads of College and Directorates to inform the bid leading up to the University planning round. The meeting noted that the Senior Vice Principal is co-ordinating input of thematic areas into the planning round and will be kept updated on progress.

An updated project bid paper will be submitted to the next REC meeting.

5.1 Online Annual Progression Monitoring System

The meeting noted the paper which provides detail on communication and training carried out by Student Systems. A review of training will be carried out with Colleges as part of PREP secondment work.

The meeting considered whether the online system should be mandatory. It was noted that a mixed system will create difficulty and inconsistency for College monitoring. However there will need to be a transitional period to allow familiarisation with the system.

The meeting proposed all postgraduate research student reviews are submitted via the online system from January 2016. This proposal will be submitted to College postgraduate offices for comment.

Action: Secretary

6. Postgraduate Degree Regulations: Leave of Absence

The meeting noted the paper which provided themes for discussion in relation to current regulations and guidance.

During discussion the meeting noted the broadening skills agenda and evolving nature of PhD study. It also considered location of study and location of residence, what elements should be considered directly relevant to the thesis and what is beneficial to a student's development. The meeting also discussed the relationship between study away and leave from participation, the implications for supervisor contact and the University's responsibility to the student and the funder.

It was agreed to ask Colleges to give this some further consideration and ask them to provide examples of leave of absence requests and how they are currently being handled. This will inform further discussion at the next REC meeting.

Action: College representatives to provide examples to Secretary in advance of December meeting.

7. Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) Results 2015

The meeting noted the closed paper which provided University level results and comparison with Russell Group quartiles.

The meeting considered that REC's role is to have institutional oversight of the survey results. The Committee is also the conduit for influencing the development of University policy and the Strategic Plan.

It was agreed that prior to the December REC meeting, Colleges will be invited to submit their responses to PRES results. The next meeting will

discuss reporting to Senate and influencing the Strategic Plan in relation to PRES results.

8. Programme Handbooks

The meeting noted the paper and confirmed the policy as appropriate to postgraduate research programmes with the addition of specific reference to supervision.

The meeting considered it was important to ensure a clear relationship between the Code of Practice for Supervisors and Research Students and Programme Handbooks. The Code provides University level information and the Handbook provides local practice.

The meeting also considered whether handbooks could be structured in relation to PRES themes. It noted that the order of themes may differ between disciplines. Academic Services' Head of Enhancement Team will review this.

Action: NK

9. Associated Institutions

The meeting confirmed that the definition of an Associated Institution was a non-degree awarding institution with an agreement giving its staff the right to supervise University of Edinburgh students as Principal Supervisor and to act as an Internal Examiner. This also facilitates joint research.

During discussion the meeting also considered that the terminology needs revising and this will in turn require a review of current Associated Institution agreements. Academic Services and Governance and Strategic Planning will carry this forward in consultation with Colleges.

Action: Academic Services/GaSP

Learning and Teaching Plans

The meeting welcomed the Senior Vice Principal who reported on planned developments in institutional culture relating to and academic governance of learning and teaching. The increasing significance of the National Student Survey is a key external driver. The plans also encompass staff recognition and reward, strengthening decision-making forums and perceptions in relation to academic regulation, assessment and the curriculum.

Of particular relevance to REC in relation to learning and teaching is development of the Early Career Researcher model for training and support for tutors and demonstrators. The meeting also noted that research-led teaching provides opportunities for postgraduate research students and opportunities for increasing awareness among undergraduate students of research and postgraduate research study.

FOR INFORMATION

10. Research Policy Group update

This group next meets on 16 October 2015 and a report will be available for the next REC meeting.

11. Early Career Researcher Support: career development

The meeting noted that a paper had been submitted to the June People Committee meeting. Some further work is to be done prior to this being submitted to the Principal's Strategy Group. The latest draft of the paper will be circulated to REC members for information.

Action: Secretary

12. PhD Study: What should an Edinburgh PhD be?

A discussion paper has been circulated to Colleges. Colleges are discussing this at relevant committee meetings and consulting with Graduate Schools to provide responses by 30 October. Student input is sought at this stage via College committees and further student consultation on any subsequent emerging policy will be sought via EUSA at a future date.

The Convener reported that a proposal to host a UK Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE) workshop in Edinburgh in relation to this topic has been welcomed by UKCGE in principle. UKCGE suggest holding the workshop next autumn and progress will be reported to a future REC meeting.

Action: Secretary

13. Task Group: Distance PhD

The meeting noted the paper from CHSS which will be submitted to the next task group meeting. The paper contains a fee proposal. Fee proposals require approval by Fees Strategy Group.

The meeting briefly discussed resources, specific support and cohort experience, noting these differ by discipline. The meeting noted that these are areas for consideration, along with benchmarking, by the task group.

The meeting also noted links with the leave of absence discussion, "What should an Edinburgh PhD be" and the Strategic Plan.

Action: Academic Services to contact Task Group Convener

14. Enhancement Themes

The Academic Services Head of Enhancement Team reported that the current transitions theme is relevant to research students and that the University is

one of two institutions that have identified this specifically. A representative on the institutional team will ensure that postgraduate research students are not overlooked. Representatives are expected to attend four meetings annually, attend internal and external enhancement theme events and encourage bidding for project funds. REC agreed to provide a representative.

Action: Convener

15. Consumer Protection Law

The Academic Services Head of Enhancement Team updated the meeting on published Competitions and Markets Authority (CMA) guidelines on higher education institutions' obligations to students. There is no change to the institution's legal obligations, however this raises the profile of students' consumer rights in relation to education. Therefore, it is important that information provided to students in advance is complete and accessible. Appropriate communication of changes is important as well as alignment of central and local information.

The Director of Student Recruitment and Admissions is leading a working group to look at implications and more information will be available to future meetings.

16. Edinburgh University Students' Association Vice President Academic Affairs: priorities

The meeting noted the paper. Of particular relevance to REC are priorities relating to extra course costs, tutoring and demonstrating and physical hand-ins.

17. Committee Priorities for 2015/16

The meeting noted the paper. It was noted that recording of supervisor training may be incorporated into planned EUCLID development work by Student Systems.

18. Committee Terms of Reference and Membership

The meeting noted the Terms of Reference and Membership.

19. Authoring Senate Committee papers

The meeting noted the updated paper.

20. Any Other Business

20.1 Conference and event attendance/forthcoming events

No report for this meeting

20.2 Recruitment strategy

The Head of Postgraduate Recruitment reported that strands of the strategy discussions include fees, portfolio, communications and marketing, and internal communications and engagement. Meetings are currently underway and completion is due in February 2016. Consultation will be undertaken and of particular relevance to REC are fees, communications and marketing and communications and engagement.

The aim is for high level understanding of the Edinburgh offer, how it is marketed and to provide an integrated, holistic strategy for recruitment.

The theme group remit and membership will be circulated to REC.

Action: JJ/Secretary

20.3 Research Councils UK (RCUK) research outcomes reporting

The Head of Strategic Performance and Research Policy reported on reporting changes to RCUK. Researchfish will be used for student reporting and GaSP are working with Records Management on this.

The onus is on institutions to communicate that student details are published in this way. GaSP will liaise with College Dean representatives on communication of recording and the relationship with PURE and studentships.

Action: PJ contact College Deans

21. Date of next meeting

8 December 2015, Room 7.01, Dugald Stewart Building, 3 Charles Street

Susan Hunter
30 September 2015