

**Meeting of the Senatus Researcher Experience Committee  
held on 7 December 2017 at 9.30 am  
in the Cuillin Room, Charles Stewart House**

Present: Professor Jeremy Bradshaw (Convener), Assistant Principal Researcher Development  
Dr Fiona Philippi (Vice-Convener), Head of Doctoral Education, Institute for Academic Development (IAD)  
Professor Neil Mulholland, Dean of Postgraduate Studies, College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (CAHSS)  
Dr Antony Maciocia, Dean of Students, College of Science & Engineering (CSE)  
Dr Paddy Hadoke, Director of Postgraduate Research and Early Career Researcher Experience, College of Medicine & Veterinary Medicine (CMVM)  
Ms Megan Brown, Students' Association Staff PGR Representative  
Mr Fabio Battaglia, Postgraduate Research Student Representative, Students' Association  
Mr Tom Ward, Director of Academic Services (University Secretary's representative)  
Professor Jamie Pearce, Scottish Graduate School for Social Sciences  
Dr Mits Ota, School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences  
Ms Kirsty Woomble, College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences  
Dr Caroline Proctor, School of Biological Sciences  
Miss Theresa Sheppard, Academic Services (Deputy Secretary)

Apologies: Ms Gabriela Hajduk, PGR Student Representative, CSE  
Dr Shari Sabeti, Moray House School of Education  
Dr Danijela Gasevic, Usher Institute  
Professor Sarah Howie, Edinburgh Medical School  
Ms Zoe Lewandoski, Director of Human Resources  
Ms Nichola Kett, Head of Enhancement Team, Academic Services

**1. Minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2017**

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

**2. Matters Arising**

**2.1 eBusiness: Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2018 (PRES)**

The Committee had considered, via electronic business in November, whether the PRES should be undertaken at the University in 2018, or whether it should continue running as a biennial survey, with the next survey being undertaken in 2019. Since there had been a lack of sufficient support for undertaking the survey in 2018, the Committee had **agreed** to continue running it as a biennial survey.

**2.2 LERU Doctoral Summer School 2018 (REC 17/18 2 A)**

The Committee noted that the next League of European Research Universities (LERU) Doctoral Summer School would be held on 9-13 July 2018 at KU Leuven and that the theme would be "The Global Society - The importance of interdisciplinary collaboration to tackle societal challenges."

The Committee **approved** the proposed approach to recruitment for the Summer School.

### 3. Convener's Communications

#### 3.1 Enlightenment Scholarships

The Committee noted that the implementation group for the Enlightenment Scholarships was due to meet the following week to improve the final process documentation. This would be circulated once approved.

The scholarships were on course to be launched in September 2018, and the advertisements had gone live.

#### 3.2 Update on Distance/Online PhDs

The Committee noted that the business case for online/distance PhDs, which had been submitted to the Fees Strategy Group, had been approved and that CMVM would be recruiting for the pilot programmes in 2018/19.

### For Discussion

### 4. Excellence in Doctoral Research & Career Development:

#### 4.1 Progress Reports May - December 2017 (REC 17/18 2 B)

The Vice-Convener updated the Committee on the significant progress which had been made on each of the three work streams in the last six months.

With regard to communication and consultation, the programme webpages would be updated as the work progressed, and two discussion groups had been held with PGR students to discuss issues, challenges, and their experience across all three work streams. Reports and updates on progress would be shared with college committees and included in IAD PGR/PGR Supervisor newsletters. It was suggested that these include a coversheet outlining future plans relating to the work.

With regard to Work Stream 1, a launch event had been held in June 2017 for a PGR Supervisors' network and the outcome of the discussion would be used as the basis for an enhanced programme of events and support for supervisors in 2017/18. A nomination had also been made for the Times Higher Education Outstanding Supervisor of the Year Award (identified from the Students' Association Teaching Award shortlist).

The Committee **agreed** to appoint a short life Task Group to explore the development of a CPD framework for PGR supervisors. It was noted that the Task Group should aim to take account of, and link to, the review of the Code of Practice for Supervisors and Research students, which would review mandatory elements of supervision, such as regular training.

Action: **Vice-Convener and Secretary**

In discussion, the Committee noted that the sector was moving towards a points-based system to quantify supervisor training and development and to encourage a systematic approach.

REC endorsed the progress on this work stream and **approved** the proposed next steps.

#### **4.2 Work Stream 2: Update on recommendations from the report into 'Postgraduate Research Student Wellbeing Strategies' June 2017 (Hepburn Report) (REC 17/18 2 B and C)**

The Committee noted that the Students' Association and IAD were appointing a joint six-month post to explore the expansion of peer mentoring to postgraduate research students, which would take into account the varying requirements of individual schools. In discussion, it was noted that the parameters of the mentoring model should be well defined, so that students would have a clear understanding of the scope of the mentoring support that they would be given.

The Committee noted the continuing dialogue with Development and Alumni and the Careers Service with regard to establishing the new student alumni platform, and supported the plan to draw up guidance for staff members acting as mentors for PGR students in a pastoral capacity.

The Committee discussed the responses and proposed actions to the recommendations identified by the June 2017 'Postgraduate Research Student Wellbeing Strategies' report, commissioned by IAD into PGR wellbeing. In discussion, it was recognised, in response to recommendation 1 that a separate mental health strategy for postgraduate research students would be desirable, to reflect the distinct issues which affected PGR students.

It was proposed that further discussion on the recommendations in the report pertaining to REC and the Excellence Programme take place at the next REC meeting, which would allow the Committee to establish future actions and priorities.

**Action: Secretary**

#### **4.3 Work Stream 3: Recording PGR students' personal and professional development (REC 17/18 2 D)**

The Committee considered the final report from the Task Group on the PGR Personal and Professional Development Record. The Committee supported the Group's recommendation of the adoption of an achievement record for postgraduate research students, to be called a Postgraduate Research Higher Education Achievement Record (PGR HEAR), and supported the specific recommendations surrounding the content of the record.

The Committee **agreed** to pass these recommendations to the Service Excellence Programme, so that it could consider how to implement them as part of the planned PGR lifecycle strand in April. The Committee recognised that wider consultation with schools and colleges regarding the recommendations would be required at that stage.

**Action: Personal and Professional Development Record Task Group**

#### **5. Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2017 (REC 17/18 2 E-H – Closed)**

The Committee noted the responses from each college to the PRES 2017 results. While response rates were lower for PRES than for the National Student Survey, they were higher in 2017 than the 2015 PRES, particularly in CSE, following a publicity drive by its Graduate Schools.

The Committee noted the following key themes to emerge from the results:

- The availability of space for PGR students was a recurring issue for all three colleges, with work needed both to manage and to meet graduate students' expectations. The development of the postgraduate centre at the Old Kirk would help to alleviate some of these issues in the longer term.
- Building communities of PGR students and providing opportunities for them to interact with academic staff were priorities, since there was a feeling among some PGR students that they were not included in the research culture of the University.
- PGR students had requested a greater amount of training, including non-academic training, peer support and teaching experience.

The Committee noted the summary of the University's PRES results in the context of the Russell Group and Universities UK benchmarks.

The Committee **agreed** to convene a meeting of Heads of Graduate Schools from across the University to address the specific topics which had emerged from the results, and other strategic issues associated with PGR students.

The Committee requested that an update on the Old Kirk project be provided for discussion at the next meeting of REC.

**Action: Convener**

**6. Postgraduate Research Student Representation (REC 17/18 2 I)**

The Committee noted the paper, which set out the current student representation opportunities available for PGR students and the challenges to providing effective student representation, which included the following:

- Inconsistency in organisation and management of provision between Schools
- Low engagement from the student body in elections for PGR representatives, and a tendency for PGT students to occupy positions, where they exist
- The tensions felt by PGR students in being both students and staff members, meaning that it is difficult to identify appropriate sources of support
- Difficulties for PGR students in communicating with students

The Committee discussed a range of initial recommendations presented by the Students' Association to address these challenges, including an audit of current PGR representation provision, highlighting gaps in Schools, as part of a wider Postgraduate Strategy which is being developed by the Students' Association, and the renaming of By-Elections to 'Postgraduate Elections' to increase engagement by PGR students.

In discussion, the Committee noted that PGR students should be made aware of the benefits of standing for elected positions. The importance of informing PGR students of actions taken as a result of their feedback was also noted.

The Committee **agreed** to support the Students' Association in developing these recommendations further

**7. PhD with Integrated Study (REC 17/18 2 J)**

The Committee noted the paper and considered the summary of current models of four-year PhDs with Integrated Study. The number of these programmes had increased substantially in recent years, and Schools had highlighted issues regarding the practical

operation of these programmes, including lack of clarity over their structure, over the mandatory training elements, and over obtaining credit.

Since the volume of PhDs with Integrated Study was likely to increase, REC **agreed** that Academic Services should seek feedback from schools and colleges on their experience of these programmes, including student feedback where possible, with a view to learning from success, and identifying any challenges where guidance or amendments to regulation would be helpful.

**8. Update on Student Administration and Support strand of the Service Excellence Programme (REC 17/18 2 K)**

The Committee noted the paper which provided a brief update on the work being undertaken by the Student Administration and Support strand of the Service Excellence Programme.

**9. Senate Committee Planning (REC 17/18 2 L)**

The Committee noted the paper, which invited members to provide input into the planning round.

**For information and formal business**

**10. Research Policy Group report**

The Convener provided an oral update on relevant themes emerging from the Research Policy Group, which would be circulated separately to REC members.

**Action: Secretary**

**11. Any other business**

**11.1 Conferences and events**

The Convener and Ms Brown recently attended the ELIR 3 committee at which universities were invited to discuss key themes to emerge from ELIR reports. Notes from the meeting relating to PGR matters will be circulated to PGR members.

**Action: Convener**

**Action: Secretary**

Professor Mulholland recently attended Trinity College Dublin for a meeting of the LERU Policy Group on Artistic Research, the focus of which was Humetrics.

Professor Hadoke attended a meeting in Cambridge to discuss the University's new centre for post docs. This development may be of interest for the Old Kirk development.

**11.2 Other matters**

The CMVM College Postgraduate Committee recently heard a report from Professor Philippa Saunders on the Karolinska Institute, which had conducted an exit survey of PhD students. This may be of interest to REC and discussed at a future meeting.

H/02/26/02

The Convener noted that Professor Sarah Howie would be stepping down from her role as a member of the Committee, and thanked her for her valuable input.

Theresa Sheppard, Academic Services  
12 December 2017