

The University of Edinburgh  
Senate Quality Assurance Committee

**Electronic meeting conducted from  
Tuesday 29 August to Monday 4 September 2023**

**A G E N D A**

**1. Formal Business**

This meeting will be conducted via email correspondence to enable the Committee to approve items which do not require substantial discussion in order to provide feedback to Schools and Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) in a timeous manner.

**2. For Approval**

**2.1 Internal Review Reports and Responses**

The Committee is invited to **approve** the following Internal Periodic Review Final Reports 2022/23, published on the Committee Sharepoint:

**Final reports 2022/23:**

- Edinburgh College of Art (ECA) Final Report
- School of GeoSciences Final Report
- School of Geosciences: Subject area of Ecological and Environmental Sciences Final Report
- School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures (LLC) Final Report
- School of Mathematics Final Report
- School of School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences (PPLS) Final Report
- School of Physics & Astronomy Final Report

The Committee is also invited to **confirm** that it is content with progress on the following 14 week and year-on responses, published on the Committee Sharepoint:

**Year on responses 2021/22:**

- Data, Science, Technology and Innovation (DSTI) Year-on Response
- School of Biological Sciences Year-on Response
- School of Health in Social Science (HiSS) Year-on Response
- School of History, Classics and Archaeology (HCA) Year-on Response
- School of Law Year-on Response
- The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies (DSVS) PGT Year-on Response
- The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies (DSVS) UG Year-on Response

### 14 week response 2022/23:

- Moray House School of Education and Sport (UG) 14 week response
- School of Divinity 14 week response
- School of Economics 14 week response
- School of Geosciences: Subject area of Ecological and Environmental Sciences 14 week response

## **2.2 Scotland's Rural College (SRUC): PhD Agriculture, Rural and Environmental Studies**

**Paper A**

A recommendation from the Accreditation Committee of Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) for Senate Quality Assurance Committee (SQAC) to approve the PhD Agriculture and Environmental Studies validation report and the addition of the programme to the existing validation arrangement.

### **3. Date of Next Meeting:**

Tuesday 12 September 2023 at 2pm on-campus in Cuillin Room, Charles Stewart House and online via Microsoft Teams

The University of Edinburgh  
Senate Quality Assurance Committee

**29 August to 4 September 2023**

**Scotland's Rural College (SRUC):  
PhD Agriculture, Rural and Environmental Studies**

**Approval of validation report  
and addition of the programme as part of the existing agreement**

**Description of paper**

1. A recommendation from the Accreditation Committee of Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) for Senate Quality Assurance Committee (SQAC) to approve the PhD Agriculture and Environmental Studies validation report and the addition of the programme to the existing validation arrangement.

**Action requested**

2. The Committee is asked to **approve**:
  - the validation report for the programme (see Appendix A validation report and Appendix B action plan); and
  - that the programme is validated as part of the existing Agreement.

**Background and context**

3. The University has a long-standing accreditation arrangement with SRUC in relation to specific undergraduate provision. SRUC currently does not have its own taught degree awarding powers, but offers degrees that are accredited/validated by either the University of Edinburgh or the University of Glasgow. This means that students studying on one of the validated programmes receive a University of Edinburgh (or University of Glasgow) degree depending on the specific degree arrangement.
4. In order to maintain oversight of standards and quality of University of Edinburgh degrees delivered by SRUC, there is an appropriate reporting structure and validation arrangement in place whereby the University, as the degree awarding body, judges specified programmes developed and delivered by SRUC as being of an appropriate standard and quality to lead to a University of Edinburgh award, thereby granting SRUC status as an Accredited Institution of the University. The University maintains oversight of this arrangement via an Accreditation Committee (involving senior staff from each institution) which meets annually. The accreditation arrangement is governed by a Memorandum of Agreement and the overall arrangement is reviewed as part of the external institutional review conducted periodically by the Quality Assurance Agency.
5. SRUC submitted a proposal to the University to extend the current accreditation arrangement to include postgraduate research (PGR) provision which was approved by Senate in May 2023. Previously, SRUC's involvement in PGR provision had been via joint supervisory relationships on University of Edinburgh degrees. Extending the accreditation arrangement to PGR provision means

devolving responsibility for the entire PGR process to SRUC (in specific agreed areas) following a validation process. Students studying on validated PhD programmes will receive a University of Edinburgh degree delivered by SRUC. Due diligence on this proposal has been carried out. This proposal was a modest extension of an existing arrangement supported by a mature relationship between two institutions which works well and ongoing monitoring arrangements.

6. The Memorandum of Agreement which governs the current validation arrangement stipulates that:
  - Senate Quality Assurance Committee will approve validation/revalidation reports for the Programmes on the recommendation of the Accreditation Committee.
  - Senate Quality Assurance Committee will decide whether a proposed new programme should be validated as part of this Agreement guided by the Accreditation Committee and SRUC's Academic Board.

### **Discussion**

7. The following due diligence activities and committee-related actions have been carried out:

#### ***Prior to the Accreditation Committee meeting in April 2023***

8. Consultation with Schools that have existing joint PhD supervision arrangements with SRUC (RDSVS, Biological Sciences and GeoSciences), outlining the proposal and asking them to comment on the appropriateness of the research environment and the skills and experience of academic staff to supervise PhD students. All Schools responded positively to the proposals, the research environment and supervision by academic staff. One School noted benefit to students and collaboration of a University of Edinburgh co-supervisor. Joint supervision arrangements will still be possible.
9. Consultation with the Institute for Academic Development (IAD) on SRUC's postgraduate researcher and supervisor training and support, as set out in the document that SRUC submitted for accreditation purposes. The response from IAD was positive, noting arrangements were clearly set out and supported.
10. Consideration of the draft PGR degree and assessment regulations by the Dean of Postgraduate Research, College of Science and Engineering (CSE), and the then Director of Academic Services, including responding to comments in the draft. Overall the draft was found to be thorough and, for the most part, the regulations aligned with current University of Edinburgh regulations (they do not need to be exactly the same, but comparable), and any variations were minor and appeared appropriate to the SRUC context. Senate Academic Policy and Regulations Committee (APRC) would have responsibility for approving any regulations which differ significantly. No major issues were identified, beyond amending the regulations to make it explicit that the University of Edinburgh's Senate will be responsible for making awards in relation to the programmes covered by the regulations. The PGR Handbook and Code of Practice submitted by SRUC as part of the proposal was highly commended by the Dean of Postgraduate Research, CSE.

### ***The Accreditation Committee meeting***

11. The Accreditation Committee held its annual meeting on 5 April 2023. As well as considering the routine business, the meeting was extended to consider the proposal. Additionally, membership of the meeting was expanded to ensure postgraduate research provision expertise. The following supporting documents were considered at the meeting:
  - SRUC PhD Concept Note
  - SRUC PhD Business Case
  - Postgraduate Research Programme Draft Regulations
  - Research Environment Statement
  - Current SRUC PGR Handbook and Code of Practice
12. The Committee was advised that no major concerns had been identified through the due diligence and a number of minor queries were answered to the satisfaction of the University at the meeting. The Committee was also advised that the comments in the draft regulations had been responded to and that these would be returned to SRUC. Otherwise, none of the documents submitted received any substantive comments.
13. The Accreditation Committee confirmed its support in principle for the proposal.

### ***Senate Quality Assurance Committee (SQAC) meeting***

14. At its meeting on 27 April 2023, the Committee discussed and endorsed the proposal to extend Scotland's Rural College's (SRUC) Accredited Institution status to postgraduate research provision [20230427agendapapersweb.pdf](https://www.ed.ac.uk/sites/default/files/atoms/files/20230427agendapapersweb.pdf) ([ed.ac.uk](https://www.ed.ac.uk)) (Paper G)

### ***Prior to Senate meeting in May 2023***

15. The University's responses to comments in the draft regulations were returned to SRUC to help with finalising the regulations and the Dean of Postgraduate Research, CSE was involved in this process.
16. Although not a requirement, the Convener of APRC considered the final version of the regulations and was content that they are in line with the University's.

### ***Senate***

17. At its meeting on 24 May 2023 Senate approved the proposal to extend SRUC's Accredited Institution status to postgraduate research provision <https://www.ed.ac.uk/sites/default/files/atoms/files/senate-24mayagendandpapers.pdf> (Paper F).

### ***Validation event***

18. In line with the Memorandum of Agreement, a validation event for the programme was held on 30 May 2023. Representatives from the University were members of the Review Panel and provided feedback and recommendations for change throughout the process (including on appeals and the Equality Impact Assessment) which have been addressed and are reflected in the report and subsequent action plan. Although there was feedback provided on the regulations, they have been no changes to the version considered by the Convener of APRC. The validation report and action plan outline the process and outcomes.

### ***Accreditation Committee***

19. A meeting of the Accreditation Committee, in line with the Memorandum of Agreement, was conducted via email correspondence between 3-10 August 2023 to seek agreement on the recommendation to SQAC. The following documents were considered:

- the validation report for the programme;
- the action plan based on the validation report.

20. The Accreditation Committee recommended that SQAC approve the validation report and that the programme should be validated as part of the existing Agreement.

### ***SRUC Academic Board***

21. On 11 August 2023 the Convenor of SQAC received a letter from the Chair of the SRUC Academic Board in support of the validation of the PhD in Agriculture, Rural and Environmental Studies by the University of Edinburgh.

22. The Chair noted that the SRUC Academic Board had reviewed, discussed and approved the development of the programme and its associated regulations. In May 2022, the Academic Board approved the programme concept note and supported the development of a University-validated PhD programme at SRUC. It was noted that the Academic Board is supportive of the University of Edinburgh accrediting the programme, building on the long-standing partnerships across research and PhD supervision in particular. It was further noted that the SRUC Academic Board had approved the Postgraduate Research Degree Programme and Assessment Regulations and latterly empowered the Doctoral College Committee to act as Board of Examiners for postgraduate research degrees in May 2023.

23. The Chair confirmed that the SRUC Academic Board welcomed the development and approval of the new PhD in Agriculture, Rural and Environmental Studies which will build on the strength of SRUC's established delivery of doctoral studies.

**Next steps**

24. The immediate next step after the Accreditation Committee recommendation and letter of support from the SRUC Academic Board is outlined in paragraph 6.

25. The current Memorandum of Agreement is in the process of being reviewed and amended to reflect PGR provision. Once completed this will be signed off by members of senior management of both the University and SRUC.

**Resource implications**

26. Financial arrangements for managing the proposed accreditation will be discussed as part of the development of the Memorandum of Agreement.

**Risk management**

27. Risks have been managed throughout by conducting a due diligence exercise and an external validation panel and will be managed on an ongoing basis via regular monitoring and review through the annual Accreditation Committee, institution-led reviews of PGR provision, and external reviews of SRUC by the Quality Assurance Agency.

**Responding to the Climate Emergency & Sustainable Development Goals**

28. Not applicable.

**Equality & diversity**

29. SRUC produced an equality impact assessment as part of the validation process and the University considered and fed into this. As part of the annual report for accredited undergraduate provision, SRUC report on data for gender, ethnicity and disability and equality and diversity.

**Communication, implementation and evaluation of the impact of any action agreed**

30. The outcome will be reported to SRUC. See above for next steps. The University maintains oversight of the arrangement via an Accreditation Committee which meets annually.

<p><b><u>Author</u></b></p> <p><i>Professor Tina Harrison, Nichola Kett, Brian Connolly</i></p> <p><i>29 August 2023</i></p>	
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**Scotland's Rural College**

**PhD Agriculture, Rural Studies and  
Environment**

**30 May 2023**

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Review Panel

<b>Organisation/ Role</b>	<b>Name</b>
SRUC Registrar (Convenor)	Kyrsten Black
SRUC Quality Assurance Lead	Karen Gray
SRUC Head of Learning and Teaching	Pauline Hanesworth
Deputy Vice-Principal Students (Enhancement) University of Edinburgh	Tina Harrison
Interim Director Academic Services University of Edinburgh	Nichola Kett
Professor of Integrative Physiology, Director of Education (Physiology, Ageing & Welfare) University of Glasgow	Neil Evans
Agri-EPI Centre	Dave Ross

## 1.2 Context

The PhD in Agriculture, Rural and Environmental Studies is a centrally devised programme that has been developed by a cross section of colleagues from across the faculties, led by the Head of the Doctoral College and the Head of Research, supported by the Doctoral College Committee. Although SRUC has been involved in the delivery of post-graduate research programmes and the supervision of students, in partnership with a range of universities, this is the first time that SRUC will offer a PhD programme of its own.

This was a bespoke validation event, which took the form of a panel discussion with members of the SRUC Doctoral College Committee (Appendix 1). The panel included representatives from SRUC and external representation from the University of Edinburgh (the validating university for the programme) and from the University of Glasgow. External Industry Representation was also sought from the Agri-EPI Centre and although they could not attend their feedback is included in the report.

During the validation event, the discussions were focused on the programme specification, equality impact assessment and the regulations. The resulting dialogue was robust and provided the panel with confidence in the approval process. The outcome of the event was that the programme was validated, with several commendations, and recommendations and will be recommended to the University of Edinburgh for approval.

This report will be submitted to the Programme Approvals and Academic Standards Committee once it is finalised. An action plan detailing how the Doctoral College Committee will address the recommendations (or explaining why they are not addressing them), must be provided to the Quality Assurance Lead.

The action plan with updates in response to the recommendations, along with the revised programme documentation must be submitted by the **14<sup>th</sup> July** for submission to the University of Edinburgh Accreditation Committee. The action plan will be submitted to the Programme Approvals and Academic Standards Committee, out of committee, for approval prior to submission to the University of Edinburgh.

This report is structured to reflect the discussions at the validation event, starting with a brief outline of the programme development by the Head of the Doctoral College, followed by the summary of the topics covered in relation to the programme and associated documentation.

## 2. Programme Introduction

The Head of the Doctoral College (HoDC) started the meeting with a brief presentation explaining the process behind the programme development, explaining that it has been in development for some time as part of SRUC's ambition to be the Enterprise University at the heart of Scotland and as part of the journey to get Research Degree Awarding Powers (RDAP) which started in 2020. In 2021 the Doctoral College committee was constituted to provide oversight of postgraduate activities and governance with the first meeting in March 2021. Over the summer of 2021 a number of activities including an update of documentation was completed and in October of that year, a review of the readiness of the Doctoral College and its research committees for RDAP, was completed along with a GAP analysis against the QAA code of practice on PGR programmes. It was decided at that point that in order to move forward and demonstrate that SRUC can provide the necessary administration, research training and support for students it would be beneficial for SRUC to develop and validate its own PGR programme validated by a partner institution.

Currently, and for many years, all PhD students at SRUC are supervised within SRUC but are registered with the partner institutions from whom they receive their final awards. The majority are registered with the University of Edinburgh, but among the 60-80 students that are currently supported by SRUC annually, they can be registered with up to a dozen partner institutions. Although SRUC does have strength in its research environment and in its existing support for students, it is felt that in order to achieve RDAP, SRUC needs to be able to demonstrate that it has the ability to cope with the whole lifecycle of a PGR programme and the associated requirements.

In March 2022, SRUC appointed the Head of the Doctoral College (HoDC) to lead and co-ordinate the provision of PGR at SRUC. One of the first steps was to create an action plan for the development of the PhD programme. Actions included setting up four working groups, two led by the HoDC and two by the Head of Research. These groups included staff and students from across all the faculties and departments. The four groups dealt with the Programme Development, Regulations, Research Training and Development and Research Support. Throughout the development the necessary documentation including the concept note, business case and draft regulations have been submitted and approved internally through SRUC's governance committees i.e. Doctoral College Committee, Programme Approvals and Academic Standards, Student Support and Engagement Committee and the Academic Board. The concept note, business case and draft regulations were discussed at the joint accreditation meeting with the University of Edinburgh in April.

## 3. Summary of Review Panel Discussions

### 3.1 Stakeholder Engagement

The panel were interested to hear the background relating to the development of the programme and acknowledged the engagement of staff and students across SRUC, however they were interested to find out what external engagement the development team undertook as part of the process. The team noted that although they did not go directly to any externals, they did undertake benchmarking against other institutions at every stage of the development, for example when considering training, progression reviews and student support they drew on the experience of existing supervisors who all supervise with other institutions and from the students who are all registered with other institutions. Furthermore, it was noted that a number of staff actively engaged in the development are very new to SRUC, so they brought their recent experience of other institutions to the development. As a follow up, the panel wanted to hear more about student engagement in the process to which the team replied that students had been involved in all the working groups and that during the development, all staff and students were given updates on progress. As part of the Student Support working group, the student member conducted some research with existing students to find out what they were looking for in terms of support and how they access it. The student members of the Doctoral College Committee confirmed that they received updates on a monthly basis.

Although the industry representative could not attend the validation meeting, they did provide feedback about the programme stating that it is to be welcomed from an industry perspective, as the importance of data and decision making on commercial operations is increasing. Providing informed insights into complex production systems with competing sustainability goals, requires knowledge and understanding of optimal practices, based on objective data-focused inputs. Furthermore, conducting studies on real-world experimental facilities is critically important. This captures the full system parameters and provides the dissemination benefit of demonstration at a level that may be identifiable with commercial practice. Finally, they stated that the Agri-EPI Centre would be willing to support the programme, given their UK network of farm assets and data focused approach to provide better management insights in commercial agriculture.

### 3.2 Programme Specification

The panel thanked the team for the submission of the programme specification for consideration and noted that there were a few areas relating to the completion of the document that would be discussed. This section of the report follows the structure of the specification document for ease of reference.

#### 3.2.1 Introduction and Special Features

The panel noted that the programme specification document should be written with potential applicants in mind and that there are some aspects on the narrative in the first section which do not feel like they are directed at students e.g. “*This programme will enhance our education and research portfolio, providing us with the autonomy to drive the direction of our PhD training.*” It was **recommended** that some of the content of this section be reworded to focus more on the

prospective student and the specific information that they might require to help them apply for the programme.

### **3.2.2 Programme Aims**

Similarly, it was noted that the detail under the heading “Programme Aims” doesn’t read like programme aims. The panel suggested that some of the content included here would be better placed in the section before and **recommended** that the team consider re-writing the programme aims.

### **3.2.3 Programme Learning Outcomes**

There was some discussion about the programme learning outcomes (PLO), with the panel noting that these are well articulated, although there was an observation that they are understandably primarily focused on the research project. The panel asked the team if they had considered adding a wider learning outcome e.g. preparing students to take their place in the world of research and be responsive to the challenges of a changing world. The team noted that they felt that the last PLO “*Embody the professional qualities of an academic researcher, being reflective, self-critical and evidence-based, including with respect to professional and personal aspirations*” was sufficiently broad enough, although they acknowledged that it was difficult to write the PLOs given the very broad nature of the programme and the subject areas that it encompasses.

### **3.2.4 Learning and Teaching Approach**

#### **3.2.4a Training**

The panel were particularly interested to hear more about the training arrangements for students, they wished to know to what extent this would be formalised and where the responsibility for students undertaking the training would lie. The team explained that SRUC already has a training and development plan in place and although the training won’t be credit bearing, students will be expected to engage in the training opportunities presented and will be required to submit their training progress record for review by the Doctoral College Committee as part of the student progression reviews. It was noted that SRUC will be recruiting a training co-ordinator, who will take responsibility for this aspect of PGR provision and that the ongoing development of the training plan and handbook will fall to the Doctoral College for oversight.

#### **3.2.4b Placement**

The panel noted the inclusion of a placement element within the programme specification but wanted to establish if these were optional or compulsory and how it fits with the overall programme. Furthermore, there was some concern about the equity of experience for students if some had the opportunity to undertake a placement while others did not. The team explained that at present they are optional and dependent on the studentship as some students are placed on collaborative studentships which have formal requirements for training and a placement, while others do not include this as a requirement, although the aspiration is for all students to have the opportunity to undertake a placement in the longer term. The panel noted that the team need to be more explicit about where the placements sit and that it is necessary for SRUC to make a clear distinction between what they are guaranteeing and what students might be able to secure through their own

funding. It was **recommended** that the team review and clarify the detail around placements in the programme specification.

### 3.2.4c Learning Community

It was noted that the team had mentioned developing learning community by using virtual platforms. The panel were interested to explore this aspect of the student experience in more detail and asked the team how supervisors support the development of a learning community more generally. In response it was noted that one research group have monthly meetings with the whole group, including all PGR students enabling them to share their progress. These meetings are informal and held remotely so even if students are geographically remote, they can still participate and all students are given the opportunity to share their questions and get feedback. It was noted that over the years this approach has been welcomed and often mentioned in student reviews back to their awarding institution. When asked if this approach was replicated more widely it was noted that there is variability in volume of research activity across SRUC. Where there is not the critical mass a lot of effort is put into getting students to work with the post-doctoral researchers and technicians, creating a supportive group. In the North Faculty, a group meeting is held every Monday morning which includes all researchers and students, allowing for discussion, sharing and requests for feedback, creating a close-knit community group. The team noted that there are also opportunities for PGR students to teach, which creates another mechanism for students to be part of the academic community and it feeds into their professional development. Although opportunities for teaching have been limited and mainly focused in Edinburgh, the HoDC is starting to work with colleagues to widen these opportunities across SRUC. Students who undertake teaching will have the opportunity to complete the Professional Development Award in Learning and Teaching.

### 3.2.5 Assessment Approach

Within the documentation, a number of formative approaches to assessment were mentioned. The panel asked if any of this would be mandatory i.e. some institutions require a seminar presentation in the 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> year of the programme and although not assessed, must be done prior to completion of the programme. Additionally, the panel noted that much of the formative assessment contributes to skills development. The team explained that within the current provision, students must present at the PhD conference every year and that will be retained in the new programme. The aim will also be to ask students in their final year to do a full seminar to the whole of SRUC and to get students involved in the setting up of that event. This requirement was not included in the specification document but is included elsewhere. The panel **recommended** that the team reflect on the detail relating to formative assessment included in the programme specification and clarify what is expected in terms of formative assessment and what is an additional opportunity.

### 3.2.6 Programme Navigation

There was some discussion about the wording of this section and how the information about the two exit awards should be presented. The team noted that the detail relating to the exit awards is included elsewhere in the regulations, however the panel noted that this document would normally be made available to prospective students on the website so it would be beneficial to include a short section with the full detail of their options and opportunities within the specification. The panel **recommended** that the section be reworded to give it a more positive inflection and to clarify the exit options depending on the student's stage in the award.

### 3.2.7 Student Support

The panel were interested to explore the arrangements for the provision of mental health support for students, given the fact that there are a higher proportion of students whose mental health suffers during the completion of a PhD programme. In response it was noted that SRUC has been fortunate to be able to provide some mental health support due to Scottish Funding Council funding. As a result, a Mental Health Occupational Therapist has been available to offer support to PGR students over the past four years and students can be referred externally too. It was also noted that the Training working group has identified the need to include mental health and resilience training as a core part of the training for students, as year 2 is a critical time for students. They have also identified the need to provide supervisors with appropriate training to support students and have already included a specific session on mental health during this year. Members of the Doctoral College staff have also undertaken Mental Health First Aid training. The panel also asked about the provision of careers support for PGR students and although it was highlighted that this is a newer element of student support provision across SRUC, some support for PGR students is starting to be provided. It was **recommended** that the data relating to the provision of support for PGR students be monitored going forward, to facilitate effective decision making in relation to the provision of support for these students and that further information about the mental health support available for students be included in the programme specification.

### 3.3 Resources

Given that SRUC will be taking the lead on the delivery and supervision of all the students, the panel were interested to hear if the team planned to grow the provision and if they felt that they have sufficient resources to support this. The team noted that there are currently 60 – 80 students following a PGR route and that the plan is to maintain current number, with the majority continuing on funded studentships with the possibility for some more self-funded students in the future. It was noted that funding constraints are a limiting factor and the team want to ensure that supervisors and students are well supported through the whole lifecycle of the programme before any further growth takes place. It was noted that going forward the programme will be monitored through the internal annual monitoring process.

Finally, there was some discussion about access to University of Edinburgh resources as some students currently benefit from this as they are registered with the University directly. It was noted that access to resources is part of the ongoing discussions between the institutions. It may be possible, that as the programme is being validated with the University of Edinburgh, students will be able to access University of Edinburgh resources but this needs to be considered and agreed within the memorandum of agreement (MOA). It was also noted that not all students are located in Edinburgh so access to resources (in particular library resources) elsewhere needs to be considered, in response the team highlighted that they have already started to review the library resource and noted that through the SCONUL agreement students in the South and West and North Faculties, should already be able to access resources from the University of Glasgow and the University of Aberdeen libraries.

### 3.4 Equality Impact Assessment

The panel noted that the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) document is overall a very useful reflection on equality, diversity and inclusion aspects that may impact the programme. There were a few areas of discussion which are noted hereafter.

The work placement has not been included in the EqIA, either from an access or completion perspective. The detail of the work placement was discussed previously however, the panel **recommended** that consideration of the work placement needs to be included in the EqIA.

The panel noted the inclusion of the following statement “*certain projects might have adjustments that cannot be enacted*” and wished to explore what is meant by this statement. The team noted this would apply to projects where there might be a lot of physical requirements due to the nature of the project e.g. field work in locations that cannot be adjusted. It was highlighted that where possible the project would be re-written, but in some instances for example, hill farming sheep, adjustments may not be possible. However, it was re-iterated that all possible avenues and the outcome of risk assessments would be considered before the decision not to adjust the project is made. The panel noted that the team will have to be very clear on the restrictions associated with projects of that nature, when advertising them.

Within the evidence it was mentioned that there is anecdotal evidence about difficulties in returning to studies after long interruptions such as maternity, but the actions suggest there is no impact of the programme on pregnancy / maternity. The panel highlighted that these two sections do not seem to match and that there would be some expectation that there would be more action relating to this e.g. closer monitoring and ensuring maternity leave policy training. The team noted that SRUC already has existing policies and procedures that can be applied in the event of maternity, but that the students need to be signposted to these. The panel **recommended** that what is in the evidence for maternity be translated into the actions and that there is also a need to include consideration of acquired or temporary disability as part of the EqIA.

The panel also wanted to explore the statement that admissions are based on “entry criteria and academic credentials” under the race section which suggests a misunderstanding of how race can impact on education up to and including academic credentials. The team noted that they would limit the potential for unconscious bias by only making the academic credentials of students available, but in relation to students applying for studentships and awarding these, there are flags for some criteria e.g. disability, BAME etc. For the programme, selection is based only the academic criteria of the applicant, so information about demographic would be removed to prevent unconscious bias. The panel were interested to know if as part of this discussion there was mention of the limits of meritocracy and the dangers of meritocracy in relation to race. The team noted that there had not been, so it was **recommended** that this be considered as part of the review of the EqIA.

Finally, it was noted that there is some missing text in 2.2 and 3.2 and that the panel suggested that for 2.3 the middle option should be a Y too.

### 3.5 Regulations

It was noted that the regulations are modelled as far as possible on the University of Edinburgh regulations, as the validating university and had been approved prior to the meeting. Feedback relating to several areas was provided including in relation to Recognition of Prior Learning, termination of supervision and leave of absence. It is **recommended** that the feedback (provided outwith the meeting) be reviewed and considered before the regulations are implemented.

It was noted that within the Appeals procedure, the requirement to include a University of Edinburgh representative in the PGR appeals process is not necessary under the conditions of the current memorandum of agreement. It was **recommended** that this be amended.

## 4. Commendations and Recommendations

The programme will be recommended to the University of Edinburgh for approval, subject to consideration of the recommendations, which are described (along with the commendations) hereafter.

### 4.1 Commendations

The team are to be commended for their collegiate approach and their use of the internal governance structures to progress the development of the programme. Furthermore, the panel noted that the team clearly put students and their wellbeing at the centre of their considerations, both currently and in the future development of the programme and wished to commend them for this approach, particularly in relation to the development of learning communities and their consideration of student mental health.

The team are also to be thanked for their full and robust contribution to discussions during the validation meeting.

### 4.2 Recommendations

In order for the programme to be recommended for approval to the University of Edinburgh Accreditation Committee, the following recommendations must be considered:

The review panel have proposed that the following recommendations be undertaken by the team in relation to the programme documentation:

#### 4.2.1 Programme Specification

The panel recommends that the following in relation to the Programme Specification:

- 4.2.1a Review and reword the *Introduction and Special Features*, to focus more on information for prospective students and the specific information that they might require to help them make the decision to apply for the programme. [3.2.1]
- 4.2.1b Review and rewrite the *Programme Aims*, moving some of the existing content to the first section i.e. *Introduction and Special Features*. [3.2.2]
- 4.2.1c Include more specific detail about the work placement, including making a clear distinction between what aspects will be guaranteed by SRUC and what students might be able to secure through their own funding. [3.2.4b]
- 4.2.1d The team reflect on the detail relating to formative assessment included in the programme specification and clarify what is expected in terms of formative assessment and what is an additional opportunity. [3.2.5]
- 4.2.1e Review and reword the section relating to *Programme Navigation* to give it a more positive inflection and to clarify the exit options depending on the student's stage in the award. [3.2.6]

- 4.2.1f The team monitor the data relating to the provision of support for PGR students, to facilitate effective decision making in relation to the provision of support and that further information about the mental health support available for students, be included in the programme specification. [3.2.7]

## **4.2.2 Equality Impact Assessment**

The panel recommends the following in relation to the Equality Impact Assessment [3.4]:

- 4.2.2a The team include consideration of the work placement in the EqIA.
- 4.2.2b The section on maternity be reviewed and the consideration of acquired and temporary disability is added to the section on disability.
- 4.2.2c The limits of meritocracy be discussed and any necessary review included in relation to race.
- 4.2.2d Minor amendments are made in relation to 2.2, 2.3 and 3.2 in relation to missing text.

## **4.2.3 Regulations**

The panel recommends the following in relation to the regulations [3.5]:

- 4.2.3a The feedback provided (outwith the meeting) be reviewed and considered in relation to the regulations.
- 4.2.3b The Appeals procedure be revised in line with the guidance included in the existing MOA with the University of Edinburgh

## Appendix 1 – Doctoral College Committee Members

Name	Role
Eileen Wall	Head of Research
Toni Dismore	Head of the Doctoral College
Dawn Latto	Research Post-Graduate Administrator
Richard Dewhurst	Head of Dairy Research Centre Professor of Ruminant Nutrition
Georgios Banos	Professor in Animal Genomic and Breeding
Rob Graham	Reader in Dept of Land use
Verena Schmidt	PGR Student
Ellie Hewett	PGR Student
Rowan Cook	PGR Student
Deirdre Wilson	Academic Liaison Manager (Edinburgh)
James Bamkin	Student Association Development Lead