

Postgraduate Research Committee Minutes - 7th October 2024 from 11am – 1pm

1. Welcome and apologies

- 1.1. Attendees: Isabella Kasselstrand, Steve Tucker, Robert Findlay, Mehmet Kartal, Rhona Gibson, Charlotta Hillerdal, Archie Graham, Baylee Schutte, Ben Marsden, Simon Bains, Kate Smith, Stuart Piertney, Lucy Leiper, Peter Cserne, Rhiannon Thompson, Samantha Miller, Ekkehard Ullner, Patric Bach, Claire Ransley (clerk), Paul Hallett, Johannes Heim, Steve Tucker
- 1.2. Apologies: Audrey Paterson, Ashar Ehsan
- 1.3. It was noted the PGR Committee will now circulate papers via Decision Time in line with University guidance.

2. Minutes of previous meetings, matters arising

PGR 25_01

- 2.1. Minutes of previous meeting approved.

3. Action Log

PGR 25_02

Minute Point		Identified Action	Individual(s) Responsible	Action Status/Update
18th June	6.6	A draft for new monitoring and progression process to be sent to coordinators for discussion.	SP	No draft circulated but oral update provided in agenda item 8 on this.
	8.1	David Stoll to be consulted for discussion on PTDF contract length at Aberdeen.	SP	Complete - Stuart Piertney and David Stoll have been in discussion.
	9.2	Social space in Crombie Halls to be promoted to PGR students in newsletter as available for booking.	CR	Complete
	9.3	Circulate Code of Practice monitoring guidance to Doctoral Reps.	CR	Complete

4. PGR Remit and Composition

PGR 25_03

- 4.1. Stuart Piertney (SP) highlighted Ashar Ehsan's title is to be updated to Director and was noted the input required from this role should be defined.
Action: Ashar Ehsan's role title to be updated and define input required for committee.
- 4.2. SP noted that PGR is now a standard item on URC committee.

5. SFC Research Assurance and Accountability

PGR 25_04

- 5.1. An overview was provided for the proposed high level priorities for the RPG with input requested from the committee.
- 5.2. Kate Smith (KS) highlighted events in DHPAH focussed on converting UG/PGT to PGR and those targeting research culture and community like symposiums/conferences.
- 5.3. Charlotta Hillerdal (CH) and Paul Hallett (PH) noted difficulties for EDI objectives due to funding/staffing limitations where it was suggested an internal case could be made for RPG funding to be used for such students. Disparities of disability ratings in PRES would further prioritise this.
- 5.4. Ben Marsden (BM) queried if previous justifications of RPG could be used and LL clarified more detail is required.
- 5.5. Simon Bains (SB) noted that based on PRES data the Directorate can look to improve study spaces, a possible PGR space and highlighted things like their fund for digital poverty which could link to digital inclusion for students.
- 5.6. Rhona Gibson (RG) suggested career readiness questions can be adapted for PGR students to provide valuable data. Other activities from Careers were included included PGR specific workshops and paid internship opportunities.
- 5.7. Rhiannon Thompson (RT) noted improvements within the recruitment process could be explored and to look at sharing good practice.
- 5.8. PH suggested PGR quality could be another high level outcome to consider relating to success within and after their PhD. JH raised concern this would be difficult to compare across schools for what success looks like.

6. Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2024 Report

PGR 25_05

- 6.1. Committee members commented on low response rates and established this is consistent across schools and sector wide.
- 6.2. Patric Bach (PB) flagged the importance of having the full data for context on statistics. LL noted there is a power BI dashboard being created for this that will hopefully follow with further data.
Action: SP to follow up more detailed PRES data from Jason Bohan.
- 6.3. The committee discussed PRES being carried out each year (university stance) vs the sector trend of every second year. Committee members agreed that a stance could be put forward to university to reduce this after next year.
- 6.4. Baylee Schutte (BS) suggested considering other ways to encourage students to fill in the survey outside of email communications. Ekke suggested embedding in MyAberdeen could be considered.
- 6.5. The committee acknowledged the university aligned with sector wide trends of needing to improve community but was doing well in areas like supervision.
- 6.6. Audrey Paterson sent on comments via email updating that a school wide survey showed results not entirely consistent with PRES with satisfaction for most areas. Increased social events and networking are examples where the school has increased opportunities since gathering results.
- 6.7. BS enquired on good practise within the Engineering school to reflect positive ratings in PRES. Mehmet Kartal (MK) suggested general approach of meeting to resolve issues quickly and hosting of regular social events contribute to this.
- 6.8. School Directors were encouraged to discuss PRES report with their schools to establish any action that can be taken.

Action: All School Directors to discuss PRES report with schools to establish action points.

7. PGRC AY 23/24 Review

PGR 24_06

- 7.1. BM questioned the difference in success rates between applicants from Africa and Scotland, noting Scotland's much higher success rate. SP mentioned that there is no single strategy the university can employ due to the varied contexts.
- 7.2. RG questioned if there is a centralised place for students to find funded opportunities and LL clarified this would be via Find a PhD.
- 7.3. Ekke queried how to access more data on recruitment and LL suggested via portal and power BI dashboard within the school.
- 7.4. SP emphasised importance of ensuring the right processes be put in place to chase leads and convert enquiries to PGRs.
- 7.5. It was also highlighted that there needs to be a strong focus on how to get students to submit on time particularly in lead up to REF.

8. Research Development Audit (RDA) Update

Oral Update

- 8.1. SP summarised discussions from previous meeting around updating the review and progression points for PGRs. It was noted there is increased pressure from workload committee to make processes as light touch as possible.
- 8.2. RF noted that if a regulation change is required it can be requested around November
Action: Robert Findlay to update on omnibus date.
- 8.3. JH voiced concern that a thorough first supervisory meeting conversation is perhaps not as common would be hoped for new PGRs to pick up on issues.
- 8.4. JH highlighted that removing the second review point may reduce oversight of issues with supervisory team.
- 8.5. KS noted the DHPAH preference would be for it to be removed or as light touch as possible.
- 8.6. LL highlighted use of the standardised APE form would be important to utilise.
- 8.7. The committee discussed the importance of students being able to flag issues at any point outside of formal progression points.

Action: SP to update on changes to review and progression processes.

9. School/Directorate Items

Oral Update

- 9.1. LL asked for an update from SB on digital only thesis submissions. It was confirmed there is now a new project to identify new system for retaining digital collections etc. A revised policy will come back to committee once ready.
- 9.2. MK queried what happens for students if they are on a scholarship and they get a job in terms of payments. LL confirmed they cannot be paid twice.

10. Doctoral Reps Group Items

Oral Update

- 10.1 No updates were provided from Doctoral Representatives.

11. AOCB

- 11.1. KS queried if there will be an update on the change to Postgraduate Research College. LL updated that emails have started moving over and schools will be updated on any processes changes as they happen. RT also noted that discussion will continue about this at the upcoming administrators meeting for their reference on any changes impacting admin processes.
- 11.2. LL updated that Genevieve Carver from Literary Foundation will now be providing writing support available to PGRs.
- 11.3. Peter Cserne highlighted they do not yet have a Law Student Representative and CR requested the school put a call out to recruit one and then confirm this with PGRC team.