

PGR Committee | 12/06/2025 | 14:05 – 15:55

Chair: Stuart Piertney (SP) | **Minutes:** Georgi Chichkov (GC)

Apologies: Jason Bohan (JB); Laurent Trembleau (LT); Kate Smith (KS); Steve Tucker (ST); Robert Findlay (RF); Ashar Ehsan (AE)

Present: Stuart Piertney (SP); Lucy Leiper (LL); Rhiannon Thompson (RT); Freya Juul Jensen (FJJ); Paul Hallett (PH); Archie Graham (AG); Carlotta Hillerdal (CH); Johannes Heim (JH); Peter Cserne (PC); Sam Miller (SM); Patric Bach (PB); Isabella Kasselstrand (IK); Simon Bains (SB); Rhona Gibson (RG); Jie Wu (JW); Tim Riley (TR); Mehmet Kartal (MK); Ben Marsden (BM); King Fung Chan (KFC)

In-Attendance: Brian Hussey (BH); Georgi Chichkov (GC); Farida Ali (FA) (Attending as a SAM rep)

1. Welcome and Apologies

- 1.1. SP welcomed attendees and introduced new members: TR; JW; LT; KFC
- 1.2. Apologies noted as above.

2. Minutes from Previous Meeting

- 2.1. Correction: SP confirmed "workload" was intended in point 5.4 (data management relevance varies by discipline).
- 2.2. GC to add FJJ's action on PGR AI Use data collection to minutes.

3. Action Log Updates

Minute Point		Identified Action	Individual(s) Responsible	Action Status/Update
27th March 2025	4.8	LL to share UKRI - parental leave policy.	LL	Ongoing – policy draft to be ready for next meeting.
	4.9	SP to progress Parental Leave policy with Student Immigration Compliance and SMT.	SP	Ongoing
	5.9	RG to share link to proposed DMP software.	RG	Ongoing
	6.3	SB to update on Digital Preservation of Electronic Theses paper progression.	SB	Ongoing - Supplier selected, awaiting financial sign-off.
	8.1	LL/SP to review Neuro-inclusive viva suggestion papers from Doctoral Reps group.	LL/SP	Ongoing - Still under discussion
	9.2	RF to provide update on thesis through Turnitin trials.	RF	Ongoing - RF to confirm if drafts are stored
	9.4	RT to share link for IP opt out for data sharing.	RT	Ongoing

- 3.1. PGR Survey (Dec 7.6): JB circulated results but not received by PGR Directors. SP to follow up.

4. Responsible Use of Generative AI – Draft Guidelines

- 4.1. SP introduced the first draft of institutional guidelines on the use of Generative AI (GenAI) in PGR research. These guidelines aim to establish clear boundaries around the acceptable use of AI in academic research and writing. They are intended to serve as a shared reference point for Schools and supervisors in their discussions with students, ensuring consistent understanding and expectations. While not intended to provide instructions on how or which AI tools to use, the guidelines focus on clarifying what is and isn't permissible. They also lay the groundwork for future developments in training, student declarations, and policy updates, and are intended to complement the broader institutional efforts being undertaken through the AI@Aberdeen initiative.

Key Themes and Discussion Points:

- 4.2. Clarity requested around terminology (e.g. Difference between AI and GenAI)
- 4.3. Use in Creative and Visual Disciplines: FJJ asked for clarification around AI-generated images, especially in creative practice and design research. These will be added explicitly to the section on "data and visual materials."
- 4.4. Need to distinguish between supportive tools (e.g., for visualisation) and content substitution.
- 4.5. Future work will include training resources, scenario-based guidance, and FAQs.
- 4.6. Group should explore potential templates for AI use statements, to be included in dissertations or published outputs.
- 4.7. Important questions raised about copyright and intellectual property: e.g. Are students at risk of unknowingly giving rights away to external AI tools? LL noted need to link to the Copyright working group to feed in re AI
- 4.8. SB highlighted the need to educate researchers on publisher policies (e.g. Taylor & Francis terms that allow them to use published material to train AI).
- 4.9. LL noted that ethical review boards may need to incorporate questions around GenAI use in research design.
- 4.10. SM asked whether monitoring PGRs' use of GenAI would become part of progression or supervision reports; SP responded that this is likely, though implementation will differ by discipline.
- 4.11. Institutional Consistency and Alignment - Discussion on harmonising guidelines with other institutional and national guidelines/recommendations: Guidelines will be included in the Code of Practice, supervisor training, and examiner guidance.

Actions:

- 4.12. GC to send Word version for tracked edits to PGOs and PGR Admins.
- 4.13. PGOs to should circulate to schools for comments and return to pgrc@ by 30th June 2024.

5. PGR Marketing Strategy (BH)

- 5.1. Brian Hussey (BH) presented a plan to improve PGR recruitment and marketing across the institution.

Core Issues Identified:

- 5.2. PGR marketing is currently fragmented, with inconsistent messaging.
- 5.3. Application and project advertising processes vary widely by School.
- 5.4. There is a lack of centralised brand identity and strategy for prospective doctoral students.

Strategic Approach:

- 5.5. Development of a tiered marketing model:
- 5.5.1. **Tier 1 (Institutional):** Central branding, messaging, and a consistent tone of voice.
- 5.5.2. **Tier 2 (School/Discipline level):** Bespoke tools, templates, and campaigns tailored to disciplinary audiences.

Proposed Actions:

- 5.6. Improve **website content** and user navigation.
- 5.7. Roll out **branded templates** for project advertisements and outreach events.
- 5.8. Work more closely with Schools to **showcase student case studies** and research highlights.
- 5.9. Form a **working group** to support ongoing implementation and cross-school coordination.

Additional points raised:

- 5.10. Ensure smaller disciplines and programmes are not overlooked.
- 5.11. Acknowledge the distinct and unique needs and strengths of different disciplines
- 5.12. Acknowledge the significant workload updating webpages will require and importance of schools working together with Professional Services teams to develop up to date content

6. Change of Circumstances Process (RT)

Proposal Overview:

- 6.1. A new proposal was introduced to automate the Change of Circumstances (CoC) process, replacing the current manual system with a more streamlined and efficient approach. As part of this shift, decision-making will be decentralised, with each School taking responsibility for reviewing and approving its own CoC applications through their respective PGR Directors or designated Officers. This marks the end of the current rota system, where one PGR Officer from STEM and one from Arts & Humanities reviewed all requests on a weekly basis. Microsoft Forms will be used to manage submissions, simplifying both application and approval workflows. The importance of maintaining parity across Schools was emphasised, and robust guidelines will be developed and shared to help mitigate potential bias in decision-making.

Identified Concerns:

- 6.2. Potential Bias at School Level – Concerns were raised that schools approving CoCs for their own students might lead to more leniency towards positive CoC outcomes for students without proper due process being followed due to familiarity. PGRC will ensure comprehensive guidance is in place to mitigate such potential bias.

- 6.3. Conflict of Interest - If a PGR Coordinator's own student submits a CoC application, an alternative School must be assigned to review it.
- 6.4. Serious Outcomes (e.g., Termination/Lower Degree Following Unsatisfactory APE) - As the PGR Director may have prior involvement, the process must account for a neutral, independent review mechanism.
- 6.5. Capacity Issues in Larger Schools - To manage high application volumes, the appointment of a Deputy PGR Coordinator may be necessary and should be approved by Senate.

Decision: Proceed with proposal; Action: refine process and revisit implementation detail.

7. Doctoral Reps Group

- 7.1. Group name changed to PGR Reps to be more inclusive of Masters by Research students
- 7.2. Concerns over Primo Research Assistant – ethical concerns about AI-generated summaries and the potential of misuse by students; Suggest reducing prominence of Primo AI tool on search interface; Action: LL to raise this with Library/IT Services

8. School/Directorate Items

- 8.1. No updates raised.

9. AOB