UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
PGR COMMITTEE
DRAFT MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 6 SEPTEMBER 2017

Present: Professor J Masthoff (convener), Dr C Bestwick, Dr B Gorgoni, Professor R Evans-Jones, Dr K Kiezebrink, M Malcolm, Professor Jane Geddes, Professor A Lumsden, D Stewart, Professor C Secombes, S Dropulijc (PGR Law), Professor T O’Donaghue, S Sarica (PGR SMSMN), V Nikolov (PGR SMSMN), Dr Andrew McKinnon, A McLaren (PGR Geosciences), Dr Amelia Hunt, Dr A Gordon P Spence, E Forster, Dr C Calder, Dr R Shanks, Dr L Leiper (clerk).

Apologies: Dr A Cuesta Ciscar, Dr L Phillip, R Findlay Dr B Lord, Dr A Bryzgel

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

1. The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting of the PGR Committee on 6 May 2017.

POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL UPDATE

2. The committee received an update from the Postgraduate Research School noting that all posts had been approved and that a recruitment process was ongoing. Professor Masthoff also confirmed that communications would be sent to PGR students and to Heads of School for circulation to administrative and academic staff.

Professor Masthoff confirmed the imminent launch of the Scottish Graduate Schools for Arts and Humanities and Social Sciences call for proposals to studentships. Professor Masthoff also highlighted the SGSSS requirement for all supervisors submitting a proposal to have undertaken supervisor training and that dates would be confirmed for December and circulated in due course.

It was noted that there were increasing expectations from the ESRC to have shared Masters level core methods training for 1+3 programmes, in particular to support cohort development. The committee raised some concerns around unpacking existing courses and requested further details of what was being proposed. Professor Masthoff noted the concerns and suggested that a small group would meet to explore this in more detail and proposals would be brought back to the committee for discussion. Colleagues from LLMVC and DHP shared that they were already collaborating to deliver core methods training which would be beneficial should the AHRC introduce this expectation.

The committee noted that the new Postgraduate Research School website was also live (www.abdn.ac.uk/pgrs) and that historical College based websites and associated Graduate School pages would be closed down by the end of September. The committee also noted that discussions over physical space were also still ongoing.

PRES 2017

3. The committee received a presentation of the institutional results from the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey from Dr C Calder. Dr Calder noted an increased response rate of 35% compared to 18% in 2015 and that the response rate was lower from distance or off campus students compared to on campus. Dr Calder highlighted to the committee that the aggregate score at Aberdeen was 79%. This
was 0.3% lower than the Sector benchmarking group. He also highlighted that the most positive statements compared to the benchmark were related to 'Teaching: Support and guidance' (68%, 7.7% above the Sector benchmarking group) and that an area for concern was responses to questions related to 'Research Culture' (e.g. “Discuss research with PGRs” was 57%, 8.9% below the Sector benchmarking group).

The committee requested that the data could be made available to individual schools. Dr Calder agreed to meet with staff from each school as requested to show a more in-depth breakdown of the data. **ACTION**: LL and CC to schedule school meetings.

**WORKING GROUP REPORTS**

4. The committee received written or oral updates from the working group focusing on Student-Supervisor Expectations; Monitoring and Progression; Academic Admissions and Admissions.

**Student-Supervisor Expectations**

5. Professor A Lumsden introduced the Student-Supervisor expectations and responsibilities statement, highlighting that it was intended as a starting point for discussion between a student and supervisor(s). The committee thanked the working group, noted that this was a useful document and made some suggestions to improve clarity, for example to group responsibilities under 'student-led', 'supervisor-led' and 'joint' responsibilities. The committee felt that this would help demonstrate that the student-supervisor relationship was a collaboration and should also be highlighted at supervisor training sessions. **ACTION**: LL to collate suggested amendments and circulate a revised version to the working group before returning it for approval to the next meeting of the PGR committee.

The committee questioned how this document would function in relation to the Code of Practice, raising concerns that if it was independent of the Code or the Academic Quality Handbook, there would be a risk of it being redundant. Professor Masthoff agreed and suggested the Postgraduate Research School would investigate how to align with the Academic Quality Handbook and update at the next committee meeting in November.

**Monitoring and Progression**

6. Dr K Kiezebrink introduced the report from the monitoring working group who clarified that the group had only met once and the remit of this group was to focus on monitoring and progression practices and requirement requirements from when a student joins the University to the point of submitting a thesis. This group would not consider viva criteria, process etc. The group focused on the formal assessments and the routine six-monthly progress forms.

The committee noted the diversity in approaches across schools and disciplines but agreed that all schools/disciplines should have formal assessments in each year of supervised study. The committee also agreed that schools should have freedom to define the format, structure and timing of formal assessments.

The committee agreed that assessment panels were a good idea, but that would need more detail to ensure resource requirements.

The committee requested more information related to assessment criteria/purpose of assessment and K Kiezebrink agreed this would be brought back to the next meeting for discussion.
The committee approved the proposal for six monthly monitoring forms to follow the calendar rather than individual students.

**Academic decision making for PGR admissions**
7. The committee received an oral update on the working group focusing on Academic admissions, noting that the group had met twice and that a report with recommendations would be brought to the next PGR committee.

**Support for PGR admissions**
8. The committee received an update from the working group exploring support for PGR admissions and approved the recommendation to extend the use of the SharePoint system across schools. It was suggested that the two working groups for admissions should meet together to bring final recommendations to the next meeting.

**PGR Admissions/Offers Data**
9. The committee received a paper on the status of PGR offers for 2017 and noted that international recruitment was on target, the University was behind on the home/EU target. E Forster (Head of SRAS) noted that PGR recruitment was ongoing and that numbers would continue to change across the academic year. The committee noted that an update on PGR offers would be a standard report for the PGR committee.

**Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR)**
10. Professor Masthoff updated the committee on the ELIR process and that PGR activity would feature as part of the institutional self-reflection document. An update would be provided to the PGR committee at the next meeting on PGR requirements, for example for PGR student liaison meeting minutes.

**AOCB and DATE OF NEXT MEETING**
11. A Gordon (LLMVC) raised the university policy on proof reading (both provision for PGRs, and the responsibilities of supervisors in that area) for discussion. The committee received a copy of the proof-reading paper that was presented at the PGT committee. The committee agreed that this needed further discussion and clarification and would wait until it had been discussed at UCTL to comment on the PGR aspects.
12. T O’Donaghue raised additional research costs (ADR) or ‘bench fees’ for discussion at the next PGR committee, in particular requesting information on institutional policies and expectations over the level of fees that can be requested. The committee agreed to discuss at the next PGR committee meeting in November.
13. The next PGR committee meeting will take place on 6 October 2017, 14:00-16:00.

LL 20 September 2017