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

Present: Professor J Masthoff (convener), Dr C Bestwick, Dr B Gorgoni, Dr B Lord, Dr K Kiezebrink, Professor, Professor C Secombes, Professor T O’Donagheue, S Sarica (PGR SMSMN), Dr A Cuesta Ciscar, A McLaren (PGR Geosciences), Dr L Phillip, Dr Amelia Hunt, E Forster, Dr R Shanks, Dr L Leiper (clerk).

Apologies: R Findlay, Dr A Bryzgel, Professor R Evans-Jones, M Malcolm, Jane Geddes, S Dropulijc (PGR Law), V Nikolov (PGR SMSMN), Dr Andrew McKinnon Dr A Gordon P Spence Dr C Calder, Professor K Shennan

1. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING
The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting of the PGR Committee on 6 September 2017.

2  POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL UPDATE
2.1 The committee received a verbal update from the Postgraduate Research School noting that all posts had now been appointed and that a temporary (maternity cover) 0.2 FTE post for academic writing support for PGRs was in place until Feb2018 based within the Centre for Academic Development.
2.2 The Postgraduate Research School (PGRS) hosted a university –wide induction in October with over 200 new PGR students attending. Feedback has been extremely positive with students appreciating the opportunity to meet fellow PGRs from other disciplines, to meet support teams across the University, to receive information about processes and monitoring requirements and many valued being part of a wider postgraduate network.
2.3 The PGRS also piloted induction programmes for year 2 and year 3 PGR students focusing on development opportunities, motivation (year 2) and writing up (year 3). Again feedback was noted as being extremely positive. L Leiper informed the committee that the PGRS was exploring blended models for delivering induction session to ensure part-time, off-campus and distance learning students were also supported.
2.4 The committee noted that the SharePoint site for nomination of examiners and examination reports had been demonstrated by registry to the Quality Assurance Committee and that roll out was planned for January 2018.
2.5 The committee were reminded that competitions (collaborative, student and supervisor-led) from the SGSAAH and SGSS were open with deadlines between December 2017 and February 2018. There was some discussion over what support schools and the Graduate School could offer students with applications. The potential for a proposal writing workshop was discussed which, if delivered in early January and considered to be useful. L Leiper agreed to explore potential funding through the Development Trust to facilitate student’s out with Aberdeen to attend.
2.6 L Leiper confirmed there would be supervisor training in December 2017 (date to be confirmed), particularly focused towards supervisors involved in applications to the SGSAAH or SGSSS.

3. PGR DATA REPORTS
3.1 The committee received a paper on the status of PGR offers for 2017 (annex 1) and noted that overall applications were down, international recruitment was on target and 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 and that the home/EU
data would be split. The committee received an update. There was some discussion around the differences in conversions.

3.2 The committee also received a paper detailing current registered PGR FTEs. In addition to this data the committee requested to be informed about the population targets and intake targets set for schools and/or disciplines.

WORKING GROUP REPORTS

3 The committee received written or oral updates from the working group focusing on Student-Supervisor Expectations; Monitoring and Progression; Admissions and Generic Skills

Student-Supervisor Expectations

4 The committee received the final version of a statement of student and supervisor expectations that had been developed by the working group chaired by Professor Ali Lumsden (annex 2). The statement is a high level document that addresses expectations of both doctoral students and supervisors at a necessarily generic level. It is envisaged as a starting point for conversations in Schools and between supervisors and their supervisees. It is anticipated that Schools / Disciplines will develop more specific frameworks to sit beneath this document and that terms such as ‘regularly’, ‘frequent’ and ‘timely’ will carry different interpretations across the university. These should be made clear to students and discussed openly with them. Such terms may also require re-negotiation at different points in the PhD journey so conversations should be held throughout the period of study to ensure that they are being interpreted appropriately.

5 The committee approved the document and recommended it should be aligned with the Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Students.

Monitoring and Progression

6 Dr K Kiezebrink provided an update from the monitoring working group who clarified that 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.

7 The committee 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.

8 The committee approved the recommendation that progress assessments should be confirmed by an assessment panel, but that more detail of resource requirements was needed.

9 The committee also approved the recommendation that all PhD candidates should be interviewed (those who could be made an offer)

10 The committee approved the proposal for six monthly monitoring forms to follow the calendar rather than individual students.

Academic decision making for PGR admissions
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

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

Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR)

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

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.

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.

The next PGR committee meeting will take place on 6 October 2017, 14:00-16:00.

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