

UNIVERSITY OF ABEREEN
POSTGRADUATE COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF MEETING 7 DECEMBER 2015

Present: Prof J Masthoff (Convenor), Prof B Connolly, Dr A Cuesta Ciscar, Dr P Fernandes, Mr L Fuller, Dr H Hutchison, Dr D Maccallum, Dr A Mckinnon, Dr J Oliver, Ms S Paterson, Prof E Pavlovskaja, with Ms C Croydon, Mr R Findlay (Clerk), Dr L Foley, Dr L Leiper, Mr M Roberts, Mrs K Slesser in attendance.

Apologies: Dr M Ehenschwendtner, Prof R Evans-Jones, Prof M Jaspers, Prof B MacGregor, Prof C Montagna, Prof B Naphy, Prof L Phillips, and Prof P McGeorge.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF MEETING ON 7 DECEMBER 2015

- 11.1 Dr Connolly requested that list of attendees be changed to indicate that she was present.
ACTION: CLERK
- 11.2 The Committee approved the minutes on the proviso of the above change being made.
Copy filed as PGC/071215/007

MATTERS ARISING

Minute 2

- 12.1 The Committee noted the response from the Convenor of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning, that if a School is unable to return exam results on time then they should complete the form to request a late return, and that this should be done on an annual basis.

Minute 6.5

- 12.2 The Committee noted that the College of Physical Sciences were in favour of an automatic writing up period, but that the College of Life Sciences and Medicine were not, as it would force students into a year unsupported by a stipend. CLSM felt that an automatic writing up year could impact on completion rates.
- 12.3 CLSM expressed the view that the project should be shaped by the student's funding period, although there was disagreement as to whether it was always possible to determine concretely from the outset how long a student's PhD might take to complete.
- 12.4 CLSM expressed concern that students on a 48 month funded PhD might be given an automatic year of writing up on top of their 48 months. The Committee agreed that this should not be the case and that regulations could be written to permit all full time PhD students 48 months of study upon admission, whether it be 4 years of supervised study or 3 years plus 1 year additional writing up.

Minute 8.1

- 12.5 The Committee noted that the proposal for changes to the procedures for fee reductions for off campus study had been approved. The Committee requested that the Off campus form be revised to indicate two clear options, with the revised form being circulated to the Heads of Graduate School for approval.

ACTION: CLERK

RESEARCHER DEVELOPMENT UNIT UPDATE

- 13.1 The Committee noted a Supervisor training workshop to be provided in June 2016.
- 13.2 The Committee noted that Granite – the Aberdeen University interdisciplinary journal – would be hosting a conference in April and had put a call out to students for papers.
- 13.3 The Committee noted that the ethics training courses had been hosted on line and that all students should be encouraged to undertake it.
- 13.4 The Committee noted the annual report from the Centre for Academic Development for 2014/15.

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STUDENT LIFECYCLE: STUDENT RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

- 14.1 The Committee noted the proposals to introduce a customer management system that would, amongst other things, facilitate monitoring of research student progress. The Committee noted that it is proposed that the system handle automation of student related forms and that it would make it easier for Schools to extract data on their students.

Copy filed as PGC/071215/009

- 14.2 The Committee were invited to provide their input on the proposals.

MENTAL HEALTH FOR POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

- 15.1 The Committee discussed the issue of isolation amongst students, in particular research postgraduates and international students.
- 15.2 The Committee noted that the University had established a working group that had looked at issues of mental health amongst students. The group would next meet in January 2016.
- 15.3 The Committee suggested that supervisors could be provided with a short information sheet on the key signs of mental illness and what actions to take. The Committee also felt that a set of slides could be developed that could be delivered at School meetings by a School representative.
- 15.4 The Committee discussed the lack of a formal mentoring scheme for postgraduates, noting that Undergraduate students had been provided with Personal Tutors. However, the Committee did note that research students in Engineering and CLSM had been provide with tutors, and that each School in all Colleges did have a PGR Coordinator who students could discuss issues with. The Committee also noted the approach taken by Language and Literature, where weekly workshops had been run for PGR students, thereby creating a space for them to interact socially.
- 15.5 The Committee agreed that a short set of slides should be developed for supervisors regarding the key signs of mental illness and the support mechanisms in place. It was agreed that these slides could be hosted on the Researcher Development Unit website.

ACTION: DR FOLEY

POSTGRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE SURVEYS 2014/15

- 16.1 The Committee discussed the results for the 2014/15 postgraduate student experience surveys.

Copy filed as PGC/071215/011 and PGC/071215/012

- 16.2 The Committee requested that each Head of Graduate School be sent the PRES results for their area.
- 16.3 The Committee noted the poor response rate and agreed that analysis of results would not prove useful. The Committee that funds for an incentive had not been secured, which might have affected the response rate,
- 16.4 The Committee agreed that it was important to establish the right level of expectations amongst students prior to them starting study.

GREEN PAPER CONSULTATION

- 17.1 The Committee discussed the Green Paper 'Fulfilling our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice'.

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- 17.2 The Committee expressed concern about the level of study that a Grade Point Average would be used at. The Committee felt that if the GPA was to include results earned at first year of an undergraduate programme that it could disadvantage students who are new to Higher Education.
- 17.3 The Committee agree that a register of External Examiners could be useful and aid Schools in appointing Externals. However, it could prove burdensome for Schools who have a particular individual in mind who was not on the register. The Committee also felt that potential External Examiners might be discouraged due to the steps involved in applying to be on the register and the additional time commitment to attend training.
- 17.4 The Committee expressed concerns regarding a baseline being established for which a University's quality of teaching will be judged against. The Committee did not feel that a useful metric had been supplied for assessing quality of teaching, and that evidence-based practices would be more useful.