

Report of the meeting of the Doctoral School Board

Date: 21st September 2017

Present:

Doctoral School Staff

Professor John Turner, Dean of Postgraduate Research

Dr Penny Dowdney, Doctoral School Manager

Aashu Jayadeep, Doctoral School Administrator

School and College Directors of Postgraduate Studies

Dr Gwion Williams, BBS

Dr Stefan Machura , Social Sciences

Dr Wei Shi, Law

Dr Helena Miguelez- Carballeira, College Director, CAH

Dr Eirini Sanoudaki, Linguistics

Professor Pwyll ap Sion, Music

Dr Gillian Jein, Modern Languages

Dr Steffan Thomas, Creative Studies and Media

Mr Joshua Andrews, Philosophy and Religious Studies

Dr James McDonald, College Director, Natural Sciences, & Director of Graduate Studies, School of Biological Sciences

Dr Neal Hockley, SENRGY

Dr Martina Lahmann, College Director, Physical Sciences & Chemistry

Professor Paul Spencer, Electronic Engineering

Dr Bill Teahan, Computer Science

Dr Sion Williams, Healthcare Sciences

Dr Jane Wakeman, Medical Sciences

Dr Paloma Mari-Beffa, Psychology

PHD Representatives

Elizabeth Woodcock, Social Sciences

Dominic Wodehouse, SENRGY

Angharad Wilkie, Medical Sciences

Undeb Bangor Representatives

Helen Marchant

Danielle Barnard

Secretary

Karen Chidley, Academic Registry

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Professor John Turner welcomed everyone to the special meeting of the Doctoral School Board which had been arranged to discuss the PRES results. Overall the University's PRES results were very good with an 87% overall satisfaction (cf 84% in 2015 and 85% in 2013) against a sector average of 81% and the University's results for each section, bar one (Progression), being in the top or upper quartile. Most section scores showed improvement. Similarly, Bangor was above the Welsh Universities sector except in the area of Progression. The University's overall response rate was 54%, which though acceptable, the University would like to see this response increase to at least 60% to give more reliable data.

The results varied considerably across the Schools, with Business and Economics consistently having highly positive scores, but with some Schools scoring poorly, and others evidently dipping in certain sections. The aim of this meeting was primarily for Directors of Graduate Studies in the Schools to explain outstanding good and poor scores in order to highlight examples of good practice, and to identify lessons learned. The Chair asked Directors to respond positively in their analysis, especially in the exploration of low scores. Explanatory general comments from PGR representatives were welcomed, although specific aspects are to be dealt with at School level.

Full PRES reports (including student comments, redacted where appropriate) compiled by the Student Engagement Unit were available for English Literature, Linguistics and English Language, Business, Social Sciences, Biological Sciences, SENRGY, Ocean Sciences, Psychology, Sport, Health and Exercise Sciences, Health Studies, Chemistry, Electronic Engineering, and Computer Sciences. Scores tables only were available for Schools with less than a 50% response rate or under 10 responses: History and Welsh History, Modern Languages and Cultures, Music, Philosophy & Religion, and Law.

The Chair also encouraged each School to hold their own meetings with their postgraduate researchers and student representatives to analyse their scores in greater depth and to provide explanations and actions.

The Chair highlighted some recurring themes from the student comments in the reports from across the institution that are of concern:

- Great variation in success of supervisory relationships.
- Poor working environments, including unsuitable office space, and access to computers.
- Limited library resources and access to computer software.
- Difficulties in attendance for part time and those working off campus
- Need to prevent feelings of isolation.
- Mental health counselling for stress and depression.
- Assessment, standard and progression unclear, and subject to changes.
- Inductions often missed due to start dates, need to improve content.

3.2 RESULTS DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The Questions in each section were presented, along with the BU scores compared to the sector. School results by section were screened, and Directors of Graduate Studies were invited to comment/explain as appropriate, highlighting good practice or reasons for issues.

SECTION 1 – SUPERVISION Average score 88 (+2 on 2015)	PRES 2017 BU	Sector PRES 2017
Q2.1 My supervisor/s have the skills and knowledge to support my research	93	92
Q2.2 I have regular contact with my supervisor	89	89
Q2.3 My supervisor/s provide feedback	89	88
Q2.4 My supervisor/s help me identify my training and development needs	80	76

Sector average for this section was 86 and Bangor had a variation from 96 to 81. Comments from the Schools included:	
Linguistics	Linguistics had high results attributed to a number of factors - all supervisors in the School have attended the Doctoral School organised Supervisor Training Programme; all 1 st year Linguistics supervisor/ researcher meetings have been arranged in advance; in 2016/17 the School introduced the Personal Development Plan (PDP) system for all of its students which was welcomed by the students and found to be very helpful.
Biological Sciences	The School fell down on the final question and have agreed to look into introducing the PDP system in 2017/18.
Healthcare Sciences	Problems were acknowledged with feedback from supervisors and it was suggested that the DoGS ensure that all students know they can speak to him and he will speak to the Supervisors on their behalf. The DOG should also tell the students that they have a responsibility to arrange meetings with their supervisors.
SENRGY	As a school that rated highly they attributed their results to the fact that from the beginning they inform all students of the other people they can speak to apart from their Supervisors, including the DoSs, the Chair of their Supervisory Committee, the HoS etc
Social Sciences	The School has arranged for a PGRs to work alongside each other and share office space, which works well in establishing peer support.
Psychology	The School acknowledged problems they have with the lack of opportunities for students to meet fellow researchers and they were encouraged to arrange further social events for their researchers
Chair and overall comments	Schools were encouraged to use the PDP system and to refer to it in their School inductions. Schools were encouraged to let the students know who they can contact if they have any problems , in addition to their supervisor (Co supervisor, Chair, DoGS, HoS, College DoGS, Dean of PGR).

SECTION 2 – RESOURCES Average score 82 (+3)	PRES BU	2017	SECTOR PRES 2017
Q4.1 I have a suitable working space	82		78
Q4.2 There is adequate provision of computing resources and facilities	85		79
Q4.3 There is adequate provision of library facilities (including physical and on-line resources)	84		87
Q4.4 I have access to the specialist resources necessary for my research	77		80

Sector average for this section was 81 and Bangor had a variation from 96 to 62. Comments from the Schools included:	
Computer Science	Due to the specialised nature of their programmes they have problems due to funding and different procedures when trying to get certain high specification computers. The provision of computer hardware across the University is also impinging on their results. It was suggested that the Schools should be more pro-active and ensure that everything is in place before the student arrives, however this was not always possible.
Chemistry	Chemistry also had problems with the University's IT systems and noted that even when the School purchases its own software they come across problems installing it. They also noted that some journals subscription had been cancelled by the Library.
CAH	The Director of Research for CAH spoke for all Schools in the College and noted that the year on year reduction of library resources and cutting of journal subscriptions was having a detrimental effect on their students and research activity by the members of staff. This was an area where concerns have been expressed for a number of years but the Dean PGR agreed to raise the matter at RSTG.
SENRGY	They too had problems with the University IT systems and in particular referred to the problems re "administrator rights" and problems with installing essential specialist computer packages. They also raised concerns regarding the quality of the working space and the lack of cleaners servicing the buildings.
Electronic Engineering	Electronic Engineering also raised concerns re the IT system and noted problems they come across getting access to more specialist computer software and hardware. They did not feel that they should have to justify to ITS why they require certain products.
Ocean Sciences	Mixed success reported for large open plan PGR room. – but each PGR has desk and computer but some issues over specialist software access. . No library on site and journal access raised.
Chair and overall comments	It was noted that Supervisors should include any specialist equipment/software they require to bench fees if appropriate. DoGS to ensure suitable accommodation provided for all PGR. Library journal and software are issues across Schools and require following up. ACTION /Supervisors/DoGS, JT

SECTION 3 – RESEARCH CULTURE Average Score 66 (+2)	PRES 2017 BU	SECTOR PRES 2017
Q6.1 My dept provides a good seminar programme	76	74
Q6.2 I have frequent opportunities to discuss my research with other research students.	68	66
Q6.3 The research ambience in my dept or faculty stimulates my work	69	63
Q6.4 I have opportunities to become involved in the wider research community, beyond my dept.	61	61

Sector average was 66 and Bangor had a variation from 82 to 44. Comments from the Schools included:	
Chemistry	Chemistry was one of the Schools that performed poorly and noted that the School does have weekly Research Seminars but that PGR students had not been intending – the School will work to welcome and engage PGRs at the School Seminars.
Biological Sciences	Have decided to invite PGR students to give presentations at the School’s Research Seminars programme
Psychology	Psychology, who received results higher than the sector, noted that it was compulsory for their students to attend the School’s Research Seminars but noted that students did enjoy attending them. There weremixed responses amongst other schools whether they should be compulsory.
Business	Business scored high, and also has a compulsory seminar series for PhD students with weekly meetings.
CAH	The College of Arts and Humanities have begun including their PGR students in the same e-mails as staff regarding anything research based and invite them to include information for the Research Bulletin etc,
Ocean Sciences	Scored high and PGRs present seminars and are encouraged to attend – although they tend to chose only those seminars of most interest to them, rather than benefit from the wider experience these provide. A PhD club, run by the PGR representatives has proven very successful – staff are invited to talk on topics (eg. Publishing a paper, REF) and leaving PGRs give talks on their thesis.
Chair and overall comments	Schools/Colleges should be inform PGRs about their School Research Seminar series in their inductions. Schools are also encouraged to treat their PGRs more like staff than students, and to encourage them to be involved in their wider research environment. PhD clubs run by the PGRs have been successful. PGRs should be encouraged to attend seminars, lectures, talks across the Colleges and a University wide calendar of all events would be very useful. It was agreed that the Doctoral School would look into the possibility of setting this up. <u>ACTION – PD</u>

SECTION 4 PROGRESS AND ASSESSMENT Average score 75 (+5)	PRES 2017 BU	SECTOR PRES 2017
Q8.1 I received an appropriate induction to my research degree programme	69	77

Q8.2 I understood the requirements and deadlines for formal monitoring of my progress	81	86
Q8.3 I understand the required standard for my thesis	76	79
Q8.4 The final assessment procedures for my degree are clear to me	73	74

Sector average was 79 and Bangor had a variation from 99 to 56. This theme is the only one in which Bangor scores in the bottom quartile, with an average score below the sector and is an area in which we must make every endeavour to improve. Comments from the Schools included:	
Electronic Engineering	Scored high mainly due to the fact that a lot of PGRs were international and sponsored by their countries. They are fully aware of the requirements and understood that the School supplies reports on a regular basis to their embassies.
Business	Business scored highest and noted that they kept their PGRs informed in their weekly seminar sessions. It should be noted that induction is not a problem for the school either as all of their PhDs start at the same time in October.
Chemistry	Chemistry felt that their results were affected by the change in the monitoring procedures for 2016/17.
Ocean Sciences	Scored poorly because most PGRs had not attended the School or College inductions, and those that did wanted more specific information than was provided. Scores by year cohort will help further analysis.
Chair and overall comments	<p>It was noted that the Central PGR Induction event had now been scheduled later, in week 2 rather than in Welcome Week, with the intention of capturing PGRs who arrive from overseas or have studentships beginning on October 1st. A second induction event took place in January 2016/17 and one will be scheduled in January in 2017/18 and April if there is demand. These events have been recorded with Panopto which may help those starting at different times. Schools and/or Colleges need to carry out their own more specific induction meetings at least one week into term – a good example is the new CNS programme of induction this year.</p> <p>Although Schools are asked to encourage their PGRs to attend the Doctoral School workshops and the DOGS are asked to work closely with their Supervisors to ensure this. Some DTP programmes intend to hold a 3rd year induction and the Doctoral School will look into the possibility of introducing one across BU.</p> <p>The online progress monitoring system (PGRS) introduced this year has been accompanied by training sessions recorded in Panopto and made available through the Doctoral School Blackboard site. Specific comments on the PGRS will be dealt with at another meeting, but the system has overall clarified the process of progression and roles of the Review Committees.</p> <p>The Chair will request the Student Engagement Unit to analyse the data by year, to determine whether recent improvements are acknowledged by year 1 respondents. Action JT</p>

SECTION 5 RESPONSIBILITIES Average Score 81 (+4)		PRES 2017 BU	SECTOR PRES 2017
Q10.1 My institution values and responds to feedback from research degree students		66	62
Q10.2 I understand my responsibilities as a research degree student		88	89
Q10.3 I am aware of my supervisors' responsibilities towards me as a research degree student		88	87
Q10.4 Other than my supervisor/s I know who to approach if I am concerned about any aspect of my degree programme		83	78
Sector average was 79 and Bangor had a variation from 92 to 72. Comments from the Schools included:			
Computer Science	Computer Sciences had the lowest score in this theme and noted that they do not hold a formal induction event for their PGRs, but they will from now onwards and the induction will identify clearly the responsibilities of the Supervisors, Review Committee and Chair. The hierarchy of those to whom a student can turn was reiterated.		
Ocean Sciences	Scored highly because of the CNS practice of nominating a Supervisory Committee and Review Committee with Personal Tutor as Chair, and where roles are clearly communicated to PGRs.		
Chair and overall comments	The introduction of the Personal Tutor in Schools, preferably as Chair of the Review Committees, but allowing any PGR to opt for any other member of staff in this capacity is advised. Responsibilities are highlighted at the Doctoral School Induction, and should be emphasised at School level inductions. Supervisor training (workshops provided by the Doctoral School each year) is highly recommended for new supervisors and old, and mandatory for KESS 2 and some DTPs. The revised regulations and Student handbook will reflect this.		

SECTION 6 RESEARCH SKILLS average Score 90 (+4)		PRES 2017 BU	SECTOR PRES 2017
Q12.1 My skills in applying appropriate research methodologies, tools and techniques have developed during my programme		93	90
Q 12.2 My skills in critically analysing and evaluating findings and results have developed during my programme		90	89
Q 12.3 My confidence to be creative or innovative has developed during my programme		85	80
Q 12.4 My understanding of "research integrity" (e.g. rigour, ethics, transparency, attributing to the contribution of others) has developed during my programme		90	86

Sector average was 86 with Bangor doing very well in this section with most schools above the sector average and with a variation from 96 to 85. Comments from the Schools included:	
Psychology & Health Studies	It was noted that the restrictions imposed by partnerships such as the NHS etc does not permit creativity and innovation in research which is why these School scored low here. Being creative in Health tends not to be encouraged where strict protocols exist.

Chair and Overall comments	Chemistry and Business scored high, largely because they provide training courses for PGRs in research methodology – in Business these are weekly sessions when PGR are brought together. Ocean Sciences PGRs did not have confidence to be creative or innovative largely because many funded projects have set objectives and Psychology reported similarly, because many PhD research project are tied to funded research initiatives and larger grants. The Chair reminded DoGS to encourage their PGRs to attend the Doctoral School Training and Development Programme courses, in particular those in research skills such as <i>Literature Searching, Statistical Modelling, Data Management</i> .
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SECTION 7 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT Average score 83 (+2)	PRES 2017 BU	SECTOR PRES 2017
Q 14.1 My ability to manage projects has developed during my programme	86	81
Q 14.2 My ability to communicate information effectively to diverse audiences has developed during my programme	83	80
Q 14.3 I have developed contacts or professional networks during my programme	75	72
Q 14.4 I have increasingly managed my own professional development during my programme	86	82

Bangor rated higher than the sector for each question in this section; the sector average was 79 with Bangor having an average of 83 with a variation between 95 and 76. Comments from the Schools included:	
Electronic Engineering	This was one of the Schools with the lowest score and they attributed this to the fact that they had a high number of overseas PGRs who were lacking in confidence in this area.
Computer Science	Lack of funding for conferences was a problem, and their PGRs tended to work alone at their computer stations.
SENRGY	The School raised their concerns regarding the University's procurement process and it was noted that this was a concern expressed across the University and not just restricted to PG Researchers. Schools were encouraged as part of their induction to inform the researchers of the staff in the School who can help with procurement. Advice on procurement can be found on the KESS website.
CAH	Hold various PGR conference presentations.
Chair and overall comments	Opportunities to engage in project management, including managing a research budget, and presenting at College level PGR conferences are all elements of good practice that might be considered where these practices are not undertaken. The procedures for drawing down 'bench fees' was discussed – but these vary across the Colleges, with CAH and COBLESS receiving no bench fee, and international PGRs in CNS receiving £2k per year. KESS and RCUK projects have budgets. Additional bench fees can be included and specified in admission letters for projects where funds

	<p>are required to meet costs of running projects. It was felt that every PGR should have access to some funds to run their projects, and that there should be parity between International and Home/EU PGRs. PGRs and supervisors should be able to manage their budgets through a cost code. The Chair agreed to take the matter to the Research Strategy Task Group. ACTION – JT .</p> <p>The Chair reminded DoGS to ensure that their PGRs attended the Doctoral School training programme courses, especially: <i>Project Management – Managing the PhD, How to be an Effective Researcher, Making Progress in the 2nd Year of Your PhD, Surviving the Viva, Finish Up and Move on</i>. These courses provide important development training over and above the specific skills training such as literature searches, statistics.</p>
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SECTION 8 PERSONAL OUTLOOK Average score 75	PRES 2017 BU	SECTOR PRES 2017
Q 21.1 I am satisfied with my life nowadays	76	n/a
Q 21.2 I am satisfied with my work life balance	65	n/a
Q 21.13 There is someone I can talk to about my day-to-day problems	72	n/a
Q 21.4 I feel my research degree programme is worthwhile	89	n/a

This is a new section – Bangor has an average of 75 in this section with a variation from 88 to 62. Comments from the Schools included:	
Computer Science	As one of the Schools with the lowest rating, it acknowledged that the nature of the discipline can create isolation and work has begun with the course reps to address this by arranging social activities.
Psychology	Psychology scored unusually low in this section, perhaps because PGR projects are often associated with larger research grants and the School acknowledged that the REF is putting pressure on supervisors and the postgraduate researchers. There is also something of a gulf between some very senior researchers and PGRs that may need to be addressed by breaking down barriers through social events.
Biological Sciences	Mental Health is becoming a big issue amongst PGRs with several cases in the School and the intention is to provide guidance over support services at Induction.
Chair and overall comments	It was agreed that the Doctoral School will arrange a workshop on mental health this term, and have already arranged for the head of counselling to brief the next Doctoral School Board on mental health indications and actions. In addition, the University has been approached by Vitae over involvement in a project on mental health amongst PGRs. The Chair also referred to the recent publication by Levecque et al (2017) in research Policy and will circulate this to DoGS or place on the Doctoral School website. ACTION –JT/PD . Schools were encouraged to set up PhD clubs similar to that in Ocean Sciences, where PGRs organise activities and build a healthy PhD community, encouraging others, especially those that seem isolated, to join in. The Doctoral School will organise further social events during the year, and the SU is beginning a <i>PhTea</i> open

	house 1200-1400 every Thursday in the SU Pontio to bring PGR across the University together over tea and coffee.
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SECTION 9 OVERALL EXPERIENCE Average score 84 (+1)	PRES 2017 BU	SECTOR PRES 2017
Q 23.1 Overall, I am satisfied with the experience of my research degree programme.	87	82
Q 23.2 I am confident that I will complete my research degree programme within my institution's expected timescale	80	82

The sector average is 82 with Bangor having an average of 84 with a variation from 96 to 73. Comments from the Schools included:	
Psychology	As one of the Schools with the lowest score, Psychology felt that this could be attributed to the points raised in the previous section , for PGRs work on projects with limitations and restrictions, and may not have the independence and creative elements enjoyed by others.
Computer Science	Scored poorly, and believed their PGRs tended to have a rather work-constrained outlook, this partly being the nature of the subject, but recognised they needed to attend to this.
Business	Scored high, largely because they have structured training programmes and have the opportunity to meet their PGRs on a weekly basis, providing a very inclusive experience.
Chair and overall comments	Discussion highlighted that PGRs in their write up year may be reporting a poor experience because they become isolated and often lose contact, especially if their use of facilities (e mail, library access) have not been extended. Alternatively, these PGRs may not be completing PRES because they do not all show in the system – this will be because their registrations may have ended, and extensions may be in process or may not have been registered on their records. It is most important that we maintain communication with PGRs in this writing up and extension period, even if they have moved away from Bangor. The PGRS requires these PGRs to be monitored, even if by review by form completion rather than face to face Review Committee meetings. It was agreed that a request will be made to the Student Engagement Unit to analyse the PRES data by year, in an attempt to separate out their scores. Further, the Doctoral School will try to ensure that PGRs keep their e mail at least until final completion (and preferably for life), and that Academic Registry are contacted to explore issues over continued registration and accuracy of current records. The Chair also requested DoGS to ensure that they, working with their PGR Administrators, keep PGR records and Banner up to date so that the feeds to the PGRS are correct. Actions JT/PD & DoGS

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND ACTIONS

The Chair indicated that many of the issues explored in today's meeting were issues that give concern. It is vital that we improve the experience of our PGRs if we are to grow PGR numbers and secure funding from RCUK and other funding bodies. We have already begun to put in place new processes but we must address those areas where concerns have been highlighted. We have today gained a better understanding of the reasons behind many issues, and we have identified examples of good practice that might be transferred to other Schools. PRES will now be annual, providing us with a measurement of progress. It is important that we undertake actions to improve areas where Schools scored poorly. At University level, the main area of concern is Progress and Assessment, and we have made major strides through the PGRS and more frequent and detailed Inductions at University, College and School levels to improve this. However, other areas require actions within Schools, to be led by the DoGS, and the Doctoral School will provide support wherever we can:

Firstly, we urge you **to hold School or College meetings with PGRs or the PGR representatives to drill down further into the issues underpinning the scores and comments**. The Student Engagement Unit and Doctoral School are available to help facilitate these meetings if required.

Secondly, **Schools with overall satisfaction scores below the sector average (81)** should draw up a comprehensive Action Plan and submit this to the Doctoral School before the end of the Autumn term.

Thirdly, **Schools scoring less than 80 in any section** should specify actions to address these specific areas, especially in relation to particular low scoring questions, and similarly submit these to the Doctoral School.

Finally, Professor Turner thanked everyone for their participation and continued support to improve the PGR experience.