Bangor University
Research Degrees Committee (RDC)
Minutes of the meeting held on 29th November 2018

Present: **Doctoral School**
Professor John Turner [JT] (PGR Dean, Chair), Dr Penny Dowdney [PD], Aashu Jayadeep
College Directors
Dr Helena Miguelez-Carballeira [HM-C] (CoAHB), Prof Debbie Mills [DM] (CoESE)
College Academic Representatives
Dr Sion Williams [SW] (CoHS), Prof Jonathan Roberts [JR] (CoESE)
Heads of DTPs/DTCs and other centres
Professor John Healey [JH] (Envision)
Other Representatives
Mr John Jackson [JJ] (Planning & Student Data)
Students' Union Representatives
Muhammad Bin Mohammad Fadzil [MF] (VP- Societies & Communities)

Apologies: Dr James McDonald, Dr Sue Niebrzydowski, Professor Robert Rogers, Dr Myfanwy Davies, Ruth Plant

ACTION

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Committee introduced themselves and the Chair welcomed all especially the new members for the first meeting of the new Academic Year.

2. COMMITTEE REMIT

The Chair clarified the remit of the RDC for the benefit of new members.

3. PREVIOUS MINUTES AND ACTIONS

a. With reference to minute 2a. 6. (**PGR supervision work allocation**), the chair informed that 100 hrs per year of supervision is being discussed. PD added that in addition, 20hrs of Viva+ 5 hrs committee chair +5 hrs review committee was also proposed by the panel. The figures have now gone out for consultation for formal agreement.
b. With reference to minute 2a. 7. (**PGR application process**), further developments are ongoing, as included on the agenda.
c. With reference to minute 2a. 8. (**Supervisor Training**), the chair informed the group that the Doctoral School had had discussions with College PGR Directors and it was agreed that more focused, short sessions will be arranged for Supervisors, in addition to the sessions that are currently running. PD also commented that the Doctoral School has secured an internship project for the summer which would be focusing on Doctoral Supervision.
d. With reference to minute 2a. 9. (**Viva presentations**) discussions will be taken up in the next meeting.

RDC

e. With reference to minute 2f. (**CDT applications**), this action has now been completed.
f. With reference to minute 5 (**PGR Recruitment**), meetings are being scheduled with College PGR Directors / PGR Leads to discuss.

g. With reference to minute 6 (**Lessons from DTPs**), this is included on the agenda.
h. The minutes of the meeting held on 7st June 2018 were accepted as a correct record.

4. MATTERS ARISING

a. Quality Enhancement Review

JT informed the Committee that the Quality Enhancement Review Group (which took over from the Institutional Review Task Group) had requested and received an action plan for the next 6 years of PGR activity (document circulated). Discussions with Schools and Colleges will be ongoing to develop strategies on improving the PGR experience at Bangor (pages 11-14) and the committee will be informed of the action plans as we progress. JJ remarked that the final document is available on the QAV website.

b. Lessons from DTP panels

JT briefed the Committee on some of the lessons learned from panel membership reviewing of DTP applications:

- The proposals must focus on the originality and significance of the DTP.
- PhD topics need to be identified and research excellence demonstrated specifically in these areas.
- Data presentation in the form of tables and examples was more effective than overly dense text.
- The following areas were key with regard to training excellence :
    - Opportunities for students including genuine CASE co-developed projects
    - Access and facilities
    - Methodologies
    - Cohort training in research support but flexibility for individuals
    - Training needs analysis and professional development with regular review and monitoring
    - Public engagement
    - Supervisor training
    - 40-50 days of training

Areas poorly addressed were often:

- End user engagement in training and operational management and on external advisory panels
- interaction with graduate schools/ doctoral schools
- Student interactions across the wider disciplines
- Selection processes: expected a multi-institutional approach; evidence of training for selection process & diversity training
- Widening participation & diversity measurement
- Data handling for DTP across institutions
- Legacy of DTPs clear

JH and JR agreed that CDT applications also look for evidence rather than text in proposals.

c. Application process

1. JT presented the responses from Admissions and IEC regarding the DSB comments (document circulated) on the PGR application process to (a) reduce speculative applications, and (b) to streamline the application process.
2. While many areas of concern have now been changed, some aspects of the process cannot be changed/omitted, because they are necessary to comply with government

sponsors and statutory checks for UKVI requirements. He informed the Committee that Admissions have implemented the changes that are possible in the revised Direct Applications system. Dr Neal Hockley, School of Natural Sciences will be creating a guide to help potential applicants, especially in respect of the proposal structure. MRes application process changes were noted (JJ).

d. PGR Regulations

The Chair informed the committee that the new PGR Regulation 03 had been approved by Senate Regulations and Special cases Committee on 4th October 2018. The English and Welsh documents are now available on the website.

5. DOCTORAL SCHOOL

a. PGR Deans' Report on the latest recruitment data/ examination results/progress

1. Recruitment:

a. The PGR Dean reported that currently we are up by 77% in terms of PGR applications received for 2019/20, which is a 54% increase in offers compared to last year, but firm accepts (6) and admitted numbers are very low (3) so far:

	No. of applications received 2018/18	**No. of offers made**	**No. of applications received 2019/20**	**No. of offers made**
All	83	13	147	20
CAHB	47		43	
CESE	14		58	
CHS	22		46	
Overseas:				
CAHB	37		41	
CESE	14		56	
CHS	17		40	

The total number of **PGR candidates is currently 524** (excluding the January entry).
PGR breakdown:

PhDs:395 (75%)
Prof Doc: 39 (7%)
MPhil: 7 (1%)
MSc by Research: 83 (16%)

Breakdown of **candidates** across Colleges as follows:

Arts, Humanities and Business:	155
Environmental Sciences and Engineering:	202
Human Sciences:	175

Male/Female proportion: **45% / 55%** but significant variability across Colleges:

	F	M
Arts, Humanities and Business:	89	65
Environmental Sciences and Engineering:	81	120
Human Sciences:	119	48

b. JH & JR commented that schools must look at innovative titles for programmes to attract potential candidates. JT indicated that CDTs and DTPs are essential for recruiting the best home/EU students and that we must maintain the quality of PGR cohorts.
c. JH raised the issue of the SNS strategy to increase Masters by Research numbers, recognising these may represent an area of expansion. JT observed that Schools with 4 year undergraduate degrees and a suite of PGT courses (eg. SOS) recruit to these degrees instead, and these have higher fee levels. The Chair recognised that options available through a variety of degree levels is probably the best strategy but that it is a matter for the Schools to decide on their own strategies of recruitment at the masters' level.
d. JJ also commented that the university might revisit fee variations for taught Masters and Masters by Research, and indicated that we are currently in line with the sector and that these are reviewed by Planning. JT indicated that PGR Leads should ensure that the direct applications include the required bench fees to cover realistic costs of research for inclusion in offer letters.

PGR Leads

2. Research Degree Result Report: JT presented the report to the Committee (document circulated).

PGR Results Sep-Oct 2018

23 PhD, 9 Prof Doc, 1 MPhil and 1 Masters by Research

Awards:

6 with no corrections

20 with minor corrections

7 with major corrections

1 referral – no viva

Overall EE comments were good. JT commented that supervisors should make sure that candidates should be submitting these with minimal errors rather than treating these submissions as a draft. Supervisors must check.

3. Progress Review Monitoring:

a. JT informed the committee that College Directors and PGR Leads had been asked to review completion of the PGRS online monitoring and to follow up on those incomplete reviews which were due by end September, notably in History, Philosophy and Social Sciences; Languages, Natural Sciences, Health, Psychology and Education.

   9 reviews had unsatisfactory outcomes and require a further review after 3 months.

   3 reviews recommend transfer to an alternative program and the Doctoral School has been contacted for approval.

b. PURE training workshops have been organised for PGRs in order to complete their PURE profile before the next PGRS review.
c. The Chair also informed the committee that the DS has received 4 Embargo requests to date. The requests were reviewed an embargo agreed for one case, and rejected for the others on the basis that time to publish was not generally acceptable reason for an embargo on open access. The Committee agreed that supervisors should be made more aware of the grounds of embargo requests as most of them did not satisfy the policy.

Raise as point of informatio n at

Doctoral School Board

d. JT indicated that risk associated with PGRs researching abroad on sensitive topics needs to be reviewed in light of current events (case in UAE). With a significant number of overseas students working on various project internationally, it is important to have a central point of contact for consultation and evaluation of risk, and this is being discussed by an RIISTG sub group. Clearly research projects should be risk and ethics assessed, and insurance requests identify location but potentially high risk projects due to topic or geographical/political area need to be identified and monitored. PGR Leads must be proactive in understanding the nature of proposed research fields during the direct application process before making offers.

RIISTG research governanc sub group /PGR Leads

4. Doctoral School Board

The Committee received the minutes of the Doctoral School Board which met on 17th September to discuss PRES results, and the regular meeting on 27th September 2018.

5. REPORTS

a. College Reports

1. HM-C (CoAHB) reported that the meeting with PGR Leads is scheduled for the week ahead.

2. JM (CoESE)- In the absence of JM, JT reported that the College is experiencing problems in contacting PGRs because of the email batch problems due to restructuring. This has been flagged with IT.

3. DM (CoHS) reported that the College PGR objectives and the PRES response will be finalised in the meeting scheduled for the coming week. SW reported on initiatives to link D. Clin pathways.

b. SU Report- MF reported that PGR students have raised a concern to the Student Council regarding teaching opportunities for PhDs, apart from the PGCert.HE. They have expressed an interest in gaining teaching experience through voluntary means. The idea was passed in the last SU Council meeting. PD attended a meeting with the concerned candidates and informed the Committee that the issue was raised due to an ambiguity in the offer letters issued to two overseas PGR candidates which appeared to promise teaching opportunities. The wording of offer letters has since been changed. JT informed the committee that allowing PGRs to teach without training or pay does not comply with COP 17 and Regulation 03. However, shadowing opportunities with qualified teachers should not be an issue. DS will be working with the SU to come up with a solution that complies with the regulations.

Doctoral School/ SU

c. KESS2/KESS2 East

KESS2: PD reported that a KESS 2 call to recruit new Masters by Research projects is now open. KESS 2 runs until March 2023 and hence there are 30+ opportunities now available for Masters by Research. Further PhD opportunities are limited until partner allocation numbers are finalised. If any funding is unspent, there could be possibilities of upgrades.

KESS2 East: have received a project number and hence expected to get the project approval before the Christmas break.

d. ESRC Wales DTP –JT reported that only 4 proposals were put forward for the recent ESRC Collaborative round, largely because of the difficulty in raising the other 50% of funding required and because partners often offer funds in kind.

e. NERC DTP – JH reported that the Envision projects are now open for applications for 2019. 11 projects are available for Bangor students- 8 Bangor own projects and 3 through other partner institutions.

f. EPSRC CDT Applications- JR reported that the 3 CDT applications are still awaiting an outcome which is now due.

6. Discussion on new policy for PGR Registration period

JT informed the Committee that according to the current registration period:

- Candidates are registered for only 4 years if they are doing a 3 yr. PhD, with year 4 as a writing up year. Contact can be lost after this period as they no longer appear in the University Systems such as Banner, emails, user accounts, PGRS, PRES email groups, PURE etc. However, some are still accessing facilities after the 4 year period and are not covered by insurance.
- They must apply for an extension beyond this 4 year period.

The Committee discussed the current PGR registration period and agreed to propose the following:

- Maintain the extension application process.
- Once an extension is granted, candidates should remain registered until thesis completion (ie. e- submission in PURE).
- A nominal fee should be charged for all writing up years.
- A higher should be charged for accessing office/lab facilities if still required.

MF remarked that the SU would fully welcome the proposal since it would mean that PGRs can continue with SU membership, which depends on the University registration period. JJ pointed out that this would mean extra work on the corporate side for processing fees etc. A nominal fee could be agreed upon further consultation with other departments and bench marking with other institutions.

Doctoral School/ Planning Office

7. Special cases/Appeals awareness

JT informed the Committee that an Aegrotat degree award for a terminally ill PGR was agreed by Senate Regulations and Special Cases Committee, and will awarded at the winter graduation ceremony. JT thanked SW for preparing the case which was submitted and agreed in a very short time.

The Committee also noted that awareness about the new appeals process needs to be understood by PGR Leads and highlighted during supervisor training.

Doctoral School

8. AOB

Nothing to report.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held at 10.00am, Thursday 7th March 2019 in Cledwyn 3.