

Bangor University
Research Degrees Committee (RDC)
Minutes of the meeting held on 6th June 2019

Present: **Doctoral School**
Professor John Turner [JT] (PGR Dean, Chair), Penny Dowdney [PD], Aashu Jayadeep

College Directors
Dr James McDonald [JM] (CoEScE), Prof Debbie Mills [DM] (CoHS)

College Academic Representatives

Heads of DTPs/DTCs and other centres
Professor John Healey [JH] (Envision), Prof Debbie Mills [DM] (DTP)

Other Representatives
Mr John Jackson [JJ] (Planning & Student Data), Dr Myfanwy Davies [MD] (QA & V)

SU
Ruth Plant

Apologies:
Dr Helena Miguelez-Carballeira (CoAHB), Prof Jonathan Roberts [JR] (CoESE), Dr Sue Niebrzydowski (CoAHB), Dr Sion Williams (HS)

ACTION:

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed all attendees, especially MD who was attending for the first time. He accepted the apologies from members who were absent.

2. PREVIOUS MINUTES

The previous minutes for the 7th March 2019 Committee meeting were approved.

3. MATTERS ARISING

a. **PGR Registration Fees** - With reference to minute 4 (**Discussion on fee levels for new policy for PGR continuing registration period**), the chair informed the committee that PGRs will remain registered until their final thesis submission to PURE, provided the extension is approved based on the normal categories of extenuating circumstances. Facilities (IS & Library) will be automatically extended.

JJ further elaborated that the proposal submitted by the Tuition Fee Group to the Recruitment Task Group was agreed on 21st June. The proposed two-level nominal fee (5% of the standard fee (£217) per year for writing up years & 10% of the standard fee (£433)) for accessing additional facilities will be charged pro rata after the 4th year for FT candidates and the 9th year for PT candidates. Clarification is sought over International fee levels (10% of International fee or Home/EU fee) through consultation with IEC. The fee implementation will start from Sept 2020/21.

Members enquired about current candidates. JT confirmed that current PGRs who are currently outside of the registration period are submitting their theses to PURE with assistance from Dr Beth Hall and Gwenda Owen in the library. However, from Sept. 2019 current PGRs will be kept registered in BANNER if they have an approved extension, but the nominal fee will be charged only from the Sept. 2020 intake in order to provide

sufficient notice of changing fee levels. Concerns were raised about possible delays in completion due to logistics with respect to external examiner arrangements. JT assured the group that special cases will be considered if delay is caused by external factors, and noted that the intention is for a pro rata fee to be charged. It is equally important to change the culture among candidates and staff to get the submission & viva planned in good time; improving submission rates and ensuring contact with PGR during final stages of the degree.

- b. **Recruitment-** With reference to minute 5 (**PGR Recruitment**) JT reiterated that the main issue faced is funding to attract high quality Home students, and visibility in the case of attracting International students. Colleges/Schools and PGR Leads are encouraged to develop strategies to improve recruitment and promote a culture of staff taking up supervision. From the BI data analysed recently, a slight improvement was noticed in applications and offers: Home/EU: up by 54% compared to last year (125 applicants) and Firm accepts up by 52% (32); International up by 15% compared to last year (393 applicants, 79 Offers 23 firm accepts). CoHAB : down by 9% (mostly in Business), CoESE up by 28% (mostly in SNS & Computer Science) and CoHS up by 51% (mostly in Health/Medical Sciences).

Members enquired whether the BI data could be made available to the College directors. JJ informed the group that representatives from schools who sit on the Recruitment Tasks Group will have access to BI and its successor (BI is being replaced). MD queried if we have a target for PGR numbers. JT replied indicating that we should have the capacity to accommodate 150 more PGRs and we are looking to recruit 50 additional PGR per year.

- c. **PRES (responses & actions)** – JT informed the committee that we had the highest response rate for PRES at 59%, and, with the exception of Cymraeg and Education, all schools will receive a full report. Report analysis is undertaken by the Student Engagement Unit and will be released shortly. The Doctoral School Board will hold a special meeting on 16th September to discuss PRES responses and lesson learned, as in the last 2 years. PG Researcher comments will not be published for Cymraeg and Education with <50% response rates or less than 10 individuals, to protect anonymity. Members enquired whether someone outside these schools will be allowed to look at those comments. JT responded that the Doctoral School could do this by request to the Student Engagement Unit.

4. DOCTORAL SCHOOL

a. PGR Dean's Report

- i. JT presented the PGR Results report dated May 2019 (**circulated**). He informed the committee that 137 PGR degrees were awarded in 2018/19 compared to 152 in the two previous years. 12.4 % had no corrections, 46% minor corrections and 32% major corrections, and 5.1% were resubmissions. Of some concern were the number of viva held within 3 months had fallen to 76% (from 85% in 2017/18) with 15% by 4 months, 7% by 5 months and 2.3% over 6 months. Late submitting candidates, sometimes without Supervisor agreement, often had major corrections. JT urged members to ensure that external examiners are nominated in good time and that

vivas are arranged within 3 months of submission, and can take place by Skype if necessary. It was noted that External Examiners commended the presence of the Chair, indicating that this was good practice.

JH commented that the work-load for internal examiners in some schools with large numbers of PGR is concerning. It would be helpful to raise awareness via Doctoral School Board that the expectation is for the Chair/ Supervisor to be involved in conducting a mock viva and these should not involve the internal examiner.

JT informed the committee that the Doctoral School will be providing supervisor training this year, building on the supervisor workshops, and focussing on the roles of Internal and Chair. He is concerned that some schools still do not follow procedures for holding Review Committees as identified in the PGR Regulations, where candidates should be given the opportunity to present their work and progress and be involved in discussion.

A discussion followed on whether the practice of candidates giving an open presentation on the day of the viva should be normalised. It was noted that when discussed at Doctoral School Board, this proposal received some resistance from the PGR community, however it was noted that such practice is beneficial for candidates, often giving them greater confidence. Concern was raised that it might have the opposite effect on less confident candidates, and required time on the examination day. Those with experience of these as external examiners found the practice valuable, and noted that examiners are not allowed to ask questions in the open session. It was agreed that such presentations should be encouraged at Bangor, and a further discussion should be raised at Doctoral School Board.

**To be
raised in
DSB**

- ii. JT informed the group that he had met colleagues from Supercomputing Wales who propose supporting PG research projects, especially in those beyond engineering , physical oceanography and molecular biology. They have engineers working with colleges to provide support and will provide a seminar in the autumn to outline their support, and follow this with training sessions within the Doctoral School's Professional Development and Research Skills training Programme.

b. Doctoral School Board

The Committee received the minutes of the Doctoral School Board of 9th May 2019. JT highlighted that with reference to minute 2.5 (**Risks**), PGR leads and potential supervisors should be identifying potential high risk projects (geopolitical/ethical/health etc.) when reviewing potential applications to ensure the supervisor and applicant are aware of potential issues and that governance, compliance and health and safety aspects will be considered appropriately. JH mentioned that Prof Robert Rogers is developing an ethical framework for RIISG.

c. Doctoral School

- i. PD informed the Committee that the DS is working on developing the training and development programme for the next academic year over the summer. We welcome all suggestions for additions from Schools & Colleges and the SU.

- ii. The DS has appointed two interns for the 2019 Internship on 'Bangor Doctoral Supervisors: showcasing successes and sharing best practice '. We will be reaching out to academic staff for their contributions.

5. REPORTS

The Chair reminded the committee that the purpose of the RDC should be to discuss matters which require decision making – such as policies etc. and members need not duplicate reports presented at the DSB.

a. QA & V

JT voiced concerns on behalf of DTP/CDT academic leads over the completion of collaborative provision documents, especially where partnerships extend from reputable UK HE partner institutions, and include numerous other organisations for placements. The DTP/CTD bids are already signed off at a high level (PVC) and therefore questioned whether these need go to strategic approval by Academic Strategy Group and academic approval by the External Partnership Scrutiny Group as Category A partnerships with full detailed documentation. The Institutional Review and Due Diligence Report, Outline Business Plan, Risk Assessment Report and Programme outline are largely covered in UKRI DTP/CDT bid proposals and these are reviewed externally for funding by UKRI panels. The additional work load is significant and is creating a further barrier to initiating these much needed programmes. He queried whether a simplified form for these would be more applicable. JH also mentioned that some of the questions in the form are not fit for this purpose. MD informed the Committee that QA & V is currently carrying out some reviews on the forms that are used and this will also be considered.

QA & V

b. College Reports

1. DM (CoHS) – No report
2. HM-C (CoAHB) – No report
3. JM (CoESE)- JM enquired whether the PGR administrative staff shortage reported earlier could be raised up to higher level Committees. JH commented that with our target to increase PGR numbers, administrative support is critical. JT agreed that the matter will be raised at RIISG and Senate and that he will discuss with Sue Peet (Student Administration).

c. SU Report- no report

d. KESS2/KESS2 East

PD reported that calls have now closed for the current round and applications are being processed, with a panel meeting on July 8th.

- e. **ESRC Wales DTP** – DM reported that Cardiff University has requested to join the Bilingualism pathway led by Bangor, and that the partner institutions expect a proposal for consideration. The new ESRC Wales DTP director will be Professor John Harrington (Professor of Global Health Law at Cardiff School of Law and Politics).

In order to improve the quality of Bangor applications to DTP pathways, a review panel might be created which would include members external to the DTP. JH & JT volunteered to be part of the panel.

f. **NERC DTP** – JH reported that even though Envision applications have been down in number this year, the quality has risen. There has been a workflow issue because the confirmation letter from NERC had not been received by Finance Office, but this was expected imminently. He commented that the DS should have more authority to overrule such risk averse situations when the risk is negligible where UKRI are involved and the award has been publically announced.

g. **EPSRC CDT applications-** JT presented a report from JR (**paper circulated**).

- The AI/ML/AC CDT studentships are equally allocated across partner institutions. This year the CDT had three extra allocations but Bangor had insufficient applicants to fill any additional places.
- The AI CDTs were allocated later than other CDTs.
- Adverts went out on FindaPhD, in BU and through a joint advert with Swansea.
- Bangor had two good applications.
- The CDT is aware of widening participation and encouraging women in Science. At Bangor we have one female applicant.
- The CDT has not yet applied for collaborative provision, citing work load attached to this.
- This CDT is currently working on a programme for Joint teaching which will inform collaborative provision process.

Members discussed that interdisciplinary projects within this CDT should be encouraged across the College as a wider strategy to get the best applicants to Bangor.

6. IMPACTS ON PGR OF BUSINESS CASES FOR CHANGE & CONCERNS

JT reported that concerns are being raised by PGRs in Chemistry and Sports, Health & Exercise Sciences over possible impacts on supervision, technical support and access to facilities. The business case for Chemistry is currently being negotiated. Outcomes will be given at the next meeting of Senate. JT indicated that assistance from the Doctoral School would be provided and further surgeries will be scheduled for postgraduate researcher discussions who are unsure of the implications for their studies.

7. DTP/CDT ISSUES INC. COLLABORATIVE PROVISION, RECRUITMENT

This was covered earlier on in the agenda (3b, 5a)

8. PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATES DCLINPSY REGULATION DEVIATIONS

JT informed the Committee that DclinPsy Programme deviations (**document circulated**) were submitted to be considered by the Senate Regulations and Special Cases Committee in order to be listed in the programme specification. MD commented that these are now passed and will be implemented.

9. REVIEW PGR INDUCTIONS & COLLEGE EVENTS

JT noted that the second and third year inductions at the College/School level adopted in CoESE were widely appreciated by PGRs involved. These and PGR conferences are examples of best practice and should be transferred into other Schools/Colleges where appropriate.

10. SPECIAL CASES/BARS ON ACCESS

JT informed the Committee that the Doctoral School has been receiving numerous applications for Bar on Access and relatively few met the required criteria (these are outlined on the form). Simply indicating that a bar is required to allow for publication in a journal is not considered adequate, although a member did raise an example where they were aware that a journal refused to accept a paper when the work was in a thesis online. He asked that further examples of journals with this policy should be highlighted, suspecting that there are few of these. Similarly, unless a specific publisher has negotiated publication of a book, intention to publish a book in the future will not be considered an adequate reason. Those eligible cases requesting bars on access of greater than 6 months go forward to Senate Regulations and Special Cases Committee.

11. AOB

DM raised concerns about the PGRs being impacted by proposed restructuring of buildings and campus locations. JT informed the group that the DS will highlight concerns in the response to the Estates Strategy.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be for the new academic year- at 10.00am, Thursday 28th November 2019 in the Main University Building, Cledwyn Conference Room 3 (TCR3).