

Bangor University
Research Degrees Committee (RDC)
Minutes of the meeting held on 7th March 2019

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), Dr James McDonald [JM] (CoEScE), Prof Debbie Mills [DM] (CoESE)

College Academic Representatives

Prof Jonathan Roberts [JR] (CoESE), Dr Sue Niebrzydowski (SN)(CoAHB)

Heads of DTPs/DTCs and other centres

Professor John Healey [JH] (Envision)

Other Representatives

Mr John Jackson [JJ] (Planning & Student Data)

Guests

Angharad Thomas [AT] (International Recruitment & Development)

Apologies: Dr Sion Williams, Professor Robert Rogers, Dr Myfanwy Davies, Ruth Plant

ACTION

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed all attendees, especially the new members and the guests to the meeting.

2. PREVIOUS MINUTES

The previous minutes for 29th Nov. 2018 Committee meeting were approved.

3. MATTERS ARISING

- a. **WAM-** With reference to minute 3.a (**PGR supervision work allocation**), the chair informed the group that there had been an update on the workload model after discussions. PD informed the Committee that 100 hrs per year of supervision could now be split among two or more supervisors. PD added that in addition the proposal would include 20hrs for viva, 7 hours for committee chair and 7 hours for review committee . JT sought the approval of the Committee to propose this to the panel. The Committee agreed that this proposal be put forward.
- b. **Feedback from EPSRC, CDT bids** – With reference to minute 4.b (**Lessons from DTP panels**) JR informed the Committee that BU would be part of a £200m collaboration to create a new generation of Artificial Intelligence leaders. The candidates will be trained at 16 new Centres for Doctoral Training (CDTs) based at 14 UK universities with 300 partners. The candidates studying at Bangor will form part of the Swansea CDT. JR commented that the Swansea team have been considering all the partners equally. He highlighted that it would be a great opportunity to be part of such research pools and to be recognised as a well-established research oriented University, even though the investment is significant.
JT informed the group about the successful Nuclear EPSRC CDT.

JT congratulated team efforts in securing the CDTs and commented that we should be proactive in getting involved in such research engagements in the future – potentially via the consultation framework opportunities that UKRI provide.

- c. **PGRS & PURE issues** - With reference to minute 5.3 (**Progress Review Monitoring**) JT reminded the Committee that requests had been made for completion of the PGRS online monitoring (2 Schools were significantly behind on this) and to follow up on those incomplete reviews which were due by the end of September. PURE training workshops have been organised for PGRs in order to help them complete their PURE profile and it was noticed that some PGRs had login issues which are currently being dealt with.

4. DISCUSSION ON FEE LEVELS FOR NEW POLICY FOR PGR REGISTRATION PERIOD

Continuing the above discussion from the last committee meeting (**Prev. minute reference 6**), JT & JJ reminded the Committee that, according to the current registration period:

- Candidates are registered for 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 PGRs no longer appear in the University Systems such as Banner, emails, user accounts, PGRS, PRES email groups, PURE, SU membership etc. and this is of concern because they require assistance in the final stages of thesis preparation, and supervision should continue until completion. Some are still accessing facilities after the 4 year period and may be not be covered by insurance.
- PGRs must currently apply for an extension beyond this 4 year period, but at present may not show as registered unless Banner is updated.

The Committee had discussed and proposed the following at the last meeting:

- 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 writing up years (as per most of rest of sector), encouraging PGR to write up promptly and to ensure continued engagement from supervisory staff (eg in relation to WAM).
- A higher fee should be charged for accessing office/lab facilities if still required.

The Committee further discussed the following at this meeting:

- AT mentioned that due to the expectations from international sponsors, a nominal fee should be charged only after 4 years for FT and 8 years for PT.
- Members noted that the nominal fee charged across the sector does vary radically (fee ranges from £200 to over £2000 are charged) and it was proposed that BU should charge reasonably, eg. around £200 - £250 for a normal extension and a higher fee of up to £500 if they are requesting use of facilities such as laboratories.
- JJ further added that the proposal has been well received and policies are going to be put in place to standardise the fee structures and definitions such as “facilities” will be included for clarification.
- The proposal will be taken up by the tuition fee group and recruitment and admissions task group to be implemented from Sept 2021 for all PGRs, including new PGRs and those in their 5th year at that time.

- JM enquired whether there would be some flexibility to waive the fees according to circumstances. JT reminded the group that special cases would always be considered according to University policies but candidates should be encouraged to suspend their studies in cases of a break due to illness. This would allow their grants to be paused and reinitiated again when they continue, and to exclude them from 4 year submission deadlines (which does not happen when extensions are granted).
- JT further pointed out that these changes would ensure that our submission and completion rates and supervisor engagement are improved.

5. INTERNATIONAL PGR RECRUITMENT : INITIATIVES- ANGHARAD THOMAS

AT presented the background context and the current situation in respect of international recruitment.

- International applications have dropped by over 300% in last 5 years.
- AT explained that this recruitment drop is a result of students in some countries having reduced interest in or stopped choosing the UK. Like much of the sector, we have seen a decline in interest from some countries due to geopolitical situations (eg. Iraq, Libya, and Iran) but surprisingly also from countries such as Jordan, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia and China where international enrolments at other universities has not declined. In 2017/18 our International enrolments were 31% compared to a sector mean of 42%, and this year have reduced to 20%.
- AT also informed the group that the Research project opportunities webpage is outdated and that IT had been requested to remove this.
- AT reiterated that it is important that all the departments work together to improve recruitment. Some of the actions which could be taken are the following:
 - Improve BU website information about specific areas and opportunities of PhD supervision.
 - Increase visibility - this should be achieved by updating PURE profiles of Academics and PGRs and linking these. JR commented that visibility is an issue with PURE. Members also discussed that the display of profile information is not consistent across Schools. JH suggested that including a map of the world with links to candidates doing PhDs would be a great addition to showcase our PhD coverage.

JT commented that suggested changes to the website have now been taken up as a priority by IT, and urged the PGR leads to encourage supervisors to complete their PURE profile with specific actions to complete the PhD themes and opportunities section and link to past and current PGRs students. He highlighted that web sites need to list PhD opportunities in Schools, Colleges and the University. Further, to help potential applicants find supervisors, staff lists should indicate broad areas of interest (eg. Lecturer Fish Biology).

Analysing the supervision data, it was noticed that only a very limited number of staff are supervising and this culture needs to be changed – all T&R and T&S staff should be eligible, and the challenge may be funding but not the will to supervise.

Staff need to engage with potential PGR at conferences and during visits to draw PGR to Bangor.

The PGR candidates should also be encouraged to update their PURE profile and make these public during their PGRS reviews.

- v. AT also presented the turnaround time for the application process which although more streamlined via the Direct Applications process, has recently showed an increase in response time.

PGR Leads in each school are the nominated officers responsible for admitting PGR via the Direct Application process for PGRs. Clear guidance is now available for the Direct Applications. It is also important that communication is done through the application such that a record of activity is maintained. This, in addition to regular reminders sent out, will speed up the turnaround time. We are competing for PGR with some universities that are sending decisions within 24 hrs.

**PGR
Directors**

6. DOCTORAL SCHOOL

a. PGR Dean's Presentation- An overview of BU PGR & considerations

The PGR Dean reported that he gave a presentation at BU Senate on March 5th. regarding the progress and development of the Doctoral School. JT further informed the Committee of the main highlights of the presentation which covered the following:

- i. DS Governance
- ii. Recent PGR enhancements
- iii. QAA review 2018 outcomes
- iv. PGR UK sector population over the last 5 years
- v. BU PGR data - 2014/2015- 2018/19
 - 75% PhD, 16% MRes, 8% Prof. Doc., 1% MPhil
 - 530 current PGRs, recent fall in CAHB
- vi. BU PGRs by gender
 - 57% Bangor PGRs are female
- vii. Falling International numbers (consistent with HE sector)
 - 31 % of PGRs are International compared with the sector mean of 42% (2017/18), 2018/19 : 20%
- viii. Decreasing PT mode of study reflecting the HE sector
 - Current 20% Part Time (consistent with the sector)
- ix. PGRs per Academic- BU(0.54) just above the sector average(0.53)- with current staff numbers we should be aiming for 650-700 PGR
- x. PGR Supervision- 232/569 eligible staff are engaged in supervising current PGRs
 - 184 Principal supervisors supervising between 1 and 7 PGRs
 - Supervision is unevenly spread across schools
 - PGR per eligible academic ranges from 0.2 to 1.2 across Schools and 0.25 to 0.83 across Colleges.
 - % PGR eligible academic engaged in supervision range from 15% to 75% across Schools, 22% to 68% across Colleges

- xi. PRES 2018 gave an overall satisfaction of 85% (sector 80) with a 54% response rate
- xii. BU's PGR submission rate needs to be improved to ensure at least 70% consistency.
 - UKRI RC sanctions policy requires institutions to achieve four-year submission rates of funded PGR: ESRC = 60%; AHRC = 70%.
(RCUK Studentship Outcomes Analysis & UKRI Studentship Outcomes Analysis reports circulated)
 - The Doctoral School will monitor progress to submission, especially in UKRI funded DTP/CDTs –but parity is essential across all PGRs
 - Review Committees & Supervisors need to enhance submission management
 - Changes planned to PGR registration should help to improve submission and completion.
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HM-C commented that it would help if submission deadlines are indicated in the reminder letters that go out from PGR administrators to PGRs & Supervisors

Raise as point of information at Doctoral School Board

- xiii. PGR completions (FT)- 70-80% completion within 5 years and PGR completions (PT)-23-34% completion within 7 years
 - Sector evidence indicates that completion is highly dependent on:
 1. Strong supervisory relationship
 2. FT rather than PT mode of study
 3. Funded PGR more likely to complete
 4. Progress review monitoring with goal setting (PGRS)
 5. Graduate School oversight (+ Induction, Training)

JT further commented that PGR candidates must be encouraged to attend milestone workshops and other training and development workshops organised by the Doctoral School.

PGR Directors

- xiv. The direct application system for PGR is now substantially streamlined. The following actions could ensure an improved recruitment drive :
 - Staff web pages demonstrating expertise are essential
 - All staff need to complete the PGR opportunities section in the PURE Portal (used by IEC)

- Encourage PGRs to complete information in the PURE Portal to exemplify projects
 - Engage potential applicants at conferences, and during visits, especially overseas
 - Consider DTP/CDT partnerships & pre-empt calls through UKRI RC commissioning frameworks
- xv. KESS 2 East is bringing the opportunity for an additional 140 PhDs and 120 Research Masters across Wales.

JT informed all that the Doctoral School is running confidential surgeries to meet with PGRs encountering difficulties.

It is important that we remember the following:

- A strong and supportive supervisor relationship is essential
- Major problems arise from not having clear goals, continuously changing targets, and concerns over career development
- We must help our PGRs disconnect healthy stress related to the intellectual challenge of undertaking a doctorate from other stresses that have a negative impact on well being
- Many PGRs, despite maturity, experience self-doubt and need encouragement and engagement, and constructive criticism
- PGRs must feel part of a School/College community –we must remove isolation
- The viva should be a positive experience
- Need for empathy –kindness

b. Doctoral School Board

The Committee received the minutes of the Doctoral School Board which met on 17th January 2019.

JT reported that with reference to minute 3.a.2 (**PGR monitoring**) most Schools have now completed. PGRS will open in April.

c. Doctoral School

- i. PD informed the Committee that PRES 2019 will be launched next week and will be open until May 17th. DM enquired how the Colleges can help to improve PRES results. JM mentioned that CoESE conducted open discussions with PGRs answering key queries. JT informed the group that reiterating the PRES action plans in discussions with PGRs is important and helps to communicate the improvements that we are making.
- ii. PD informed the group that the Doctoral School is hosting an IP workshop in April which is organised by Vitae.

7. REPORTS

a. QAA

No report

b. College Reports

1. DM (CoHS) reported that the College is planning to hold surgeries for PGRs. A library training event had also been organised and received good feedback.
2. HM-C (CoAHB) – No report
3. JM (CoESE)- mentioned that the PGR administrative staff who were allocated for dedicated PGR work were now handling undergraduate work as well. Data management has become an issue as a result of this. JM also enquired whether any Chemistry PGRs have raised any concern with the Doctoral School regarding the consultation situation at the School. JT informed the group that the Doctoral School is attending meetings regarding this but no decisions can be reached until the business cases have been dealt with.

c. **SU Report-** no report

d. **KESS2/KESS2 East**

KESS 2: the January claim has been submitted. A call for Research Masters project proposals will be opening shortly.

KESS2 East: The funding agreement has now been approved. We've been awarded £16 million for the project: £9.3 million ESF grant. This is to deliver 260 collaborative projects across Wales: 140 PhDs and 120 Research Masters. KESS 2 East also runs until March 2023.

e. **ESRC Wales DTP** – no report.

f. **NERC DTP** –JH reported that the annual recruitment and selection process is ongoing. Applications have been down this year. SNS first year PhD presentations were a huge success.

g. **EPSRC CDT applications-** JR reported this – reference 3.b

8. SPECIAL CASES/APPEALS AWARENESS

- i. JT informed the Committee that the Doctoral School has been receiving numerous applications for embargo cases, few meeting the required criteria.
- ii. An Embargo application form is now available which clearly specifies the criteria. A request can be made to the Doctoral School (pgr@bangor.ac.uk) which can allow up to six months bar on access. If a request is for longer than six months it will be forwarded to Senate Regulations and Special Cases Committee.
- iii. PD added that PGR Administrative staff and library contacts will be notified after a decision has been made.

9. AOB

Nothing to report.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held at 10.00am, Thursday 6th June 2019 in the Council Chamber.