

Bangor University
Research Degrees Committee (RDC)
Minutes of the meeting held on 18th May 2020

Present:

Doctoral School

Professor Andrew Hiscock [AH] (PGR Dean, Chair), Penny Dowdney [PD], Aashu Jayadeep

College Directors of PGR

Prof. Debbie Mills [DM] (CoHS)

QA&VU

Mrs Sarah Jackson [SJ]

Representatives from support services

Mr John Jackson [JJ] (Planning & Student Data), Dr Beth Hall [BH](Library & Archives);
Mairwen Owen (Library & Archives)

SU Representative

Harry Riley [HR] (SU)

Representative from PGR administrative roles

Mrs Gillian Griffith, Mrs Beth Hamilton-Hine, Mrs Elizabeth Williams

Apologies:

Prof. James McDonald (CoESE); Mrs Sian Owen (CoAHB), Dr Myfanwy Davies (QA & VU),
Dr Ed Wright (PGR Admn)

ACTION

1. INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed all members especially the new members. He mentioned that RDC membership has been reviewed and membership has now gone back to the original ToRs in order to avoid as much overlap as possible with DSB membership. A proposed reporting structure has been forwarded to RIISTG and QA&VU for approval.

He acknowledged the apologies that had been sent.

Thanks, were conveyed to Dr Helena Miguelez-Carballeira and Dr Beth Hall for their contributions to RDC.

2. PREVIOUS MINUTES

The previous minutes for the 17th March 2020 Committee meeting were approved.

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

- a. With reference to minute **3 a. & 4. a. - Pre-viva presentation-** will be covered under agenda **(4.a)**
- b. With reference to minute **3 (b & c). Changes in Regulation 03** - will be covered under agenda **(4.b)**
- c. With reference to minute **4. b. - Delays in external examiner signing off viva outcomes,** the Chair invited SJ to comment. SJ suggested that in cases of resubmission, it would be better to include the agreed timeframe to respond (typically four weeks) into the code of practice and not in the external examiners appointment letter so that they could be made aware of the expectations.

The Chair informed the group that the DS will be drafting a proposal for this amendment in the code and will be sending that to the QA & VU for approval.

**Doctoral
School**

- d. With reference to minute **5. a. - Report progress review monitoring to T&L Committee,** the Chair reiterated that all data coming forward to the RDC and DSB in terms of recruitment and head counts will also be reported to the T&L committee through the secretary to T&L Committee, Karen Chidley.

PD

- e. With reference to minute **5. a. – Issue of R coding for DTPs / CDTs,** the Chair mentioned that, at the moment, the finance office could see no evidence that we were out of sync with what other institutions are doing.

4. MATTERS ARISING

a. Open presentation on day of viva

The Chair commented that the DS circulated a BOS survey to gather opinions on whether an open presentation on the day of the viva would be supported by PGRs and PGR related staff. The survey results were discussed at the recent Doctoral School Board as below:

- More PGRs (37) than staff (1) responded and the responses seemed to be divided.
- It was agreed that the pre-viva presentation could be made an optional rather than a mandatory requirement.
- The DS could also help to advertise these presentations if requested by Colleges/Schools.

b. Changes in regulations:

The Chair updated RDC about the work on regulations:

The Force Majeure Academic Regulation (Regulation 22) has been published, taking into consideration the current situation with Covid-19 and any future emergencies.

A final meeting is scheduled for June for the publication of the amended conventional PGR regulations.

1. PGR candidates may be able to move more than once between full time and part time study mode, particularly in response to their own changing circumstances, during their programme with the agreement of their supervisory committee and the SSCC where necessary.
2. Not all schools are operating a probationary year for MPhil/ PhD and it is proposed that this be optional.
3. In Force Majeure circumstances, if all the examiners agree, the thesis could be submitted solely electronically prior to the Viva.
4. Vivas can now happen at up to four sites and if more are required a request needs to be submitted to the DS.
5. MSc x Research—changes proposed by James McDonald: a write up period of three months; no viva requirement for cases where corrections concerned presentation of work.
6. PGR continuation fee amendment-candidates continue to have access to library and facilities and supervision continues with a proposed nominal fee.

The chair requested JJ to comment on discussions around point 6 for clarity among members of DSB. JJ confirmed that RDC discussions have led to the fee amendment such that if their study rolls into a fifth year, a nominal fee would be charged to continue to use resources. Students continuing in situ utilizing facilities and resources in Bangor for a fifth year of study or more will be charged a nominal fee - 10% of the annual fee for the academic year. It will be 5% if they are working remotely (i.e. away from Bangor). This will be implemented for students registering from 2020/21.

DM enquired if the students would have to pay the fees if they got an extension because of extreme circumstances - like the pandemic from the fourth year to the fifth year at that time. JJ commented that the tuition fees group would decide each case based on the extenuating circumstances as it is happening now.

c. Leverhulme application

The internal competition bid selected the Sustainability and Heritage submission. Meetings are ongoing to complete the bid in time for the deadline.

d. PURE

PGRs are being encouraged to complete profiles. Supervisors are asked to complete the new section: 'PG project opportunities' with a view to helping PGR recruitment.

e. DTP / CDT reporting changes

DTP/CDT steering groups will meet twice a year and reports will be submitted to this Committee. A report template will be prepared by the Doctoral School.

5. DOCTORAL SCHOOL

a. PGR Dean's Report

i. Latest recruitment data

The Dean reported the recruitment stats. as per BI reporting (as of May 2020) (document circulated). He requested PGR Directors to go through the data and inform the Doctoral School if they notice any discrepancies.

**College
Directors**

ii. Examination Results

The Chair enquired about any examination results/ outcomes to be reported to RDC. SJ reported that examination results could not be submitted due to hard copies not being accessible during lockdown. SJ added that if a PGR fails to resubmit within 12 months all the reporting forms go immediately to the awards office at that point and they write to the PGR. Those outcomes are seen very quickly. If they've only got minor or major amendments with the three or six months, then those forms don't go to the awards office until after those corrections have been made and the degree has been awarded. The Chair requested for these copies to be made available to the RDC as they are prepared.

iii. Financial support (fees)

The Chair reported that under the present COVID-19 related circumstances, the University is initiating a procedure for students who find themselves in dire financial circumstances as a result of lockdown. The procedure is for PGRs to seek assistance with BU fees if they are not funded. Prof David Thomas, PVC, is reaching out to the colleges for responses in order to finalise the procedure. The Doctoral School will be informing Schools/Colleges once it has been finalised.

b. Doctoral School Board

The Chair reported that the following points were discussed at the DSB:

i. PGR forward planning

PD reported that the Doctoral School developed PGR forward planning document templates and a process to enable us to assess the impacts of Covid-19 on PGR projects across the University. PGRs and their supervisors need to generate a clear and detailed forward plan including a risk assessment if necessary. The reports submitted will be analysed by the end of May to be submitted to Prof. David Thomas, PVC Research & Impact.

The Chair thanked everyone for their cooperation and effort to put this in place at such short notice.

ii. PGR admissions

The Chair reported that the DSB discussed a paper submitted by PGR lead, Neal Hockley [NH] regarding an ongoing review of the PGR admissions system. Some useful changes had already been made by both the admissions and the apps team. The proposal now is to identify ways to make the admissions process work more efficiently for all concerned, reducing the effort required from PGR leads and improving the experience for applicants. NH has requested feedback from other PGR leads. The DS will be discussing this further.

iii. Maternity, paternity and adoption practices for PGRs

The Chair invited PD to comment on the above issue raised by PGR reps in DSB. PD reported that a meeting will be initiated between the Doctoral School, HR and RIIO to discuss standardisation of maternity, paternity and adoption practices for PGRs.

iv. Progress Review monitoring (PGRS)

The Chair commented that an update will be reported at the next DSB and RDC meetings, considering the ongoing situation with Covid-19. SJ commented that it is important that the annual review takes place so that problems do not escalate towards the end of the PGR's programme.

v. PRES

PD reported the following:

- The PRES survey closed on May 17th.
- The closing response rate was 53% overall.
- All three Colleges have over 50% response rate.
- SEU will be preparing the reports and will be circulating them.
- The usual PRES meeting with SEU in September will analyse the reports.

PD expressed thanks to everyone involved for all the work that went in to gently persuading and encouraging the PGRs to respond.

c. Doctoral School

PD informed the Committee about the latest DS initiatives:

- As mentioned earlier (Agenda 5.b.i) the DS has been working to adapt to the Covid-19 situation. We have been keeping the PGR community updated about the evolving situation along with Prof. David Thomas. Groups and discussions have been set up and we are also working with the SU to try and offer a forum for our PGRs to raise concerns and deal with issues. PGR forward planning documents have been prepared, the PGR regulations are being reviewed and appropriate measures are being taken to accommodate all kinds of unforeseen situations.
- The DS has now started offering most of the workshops which make up the training & development programme online. It's been a very positive learning experience. The uptake has been good, and we have got some good feedback from the PGRs as the sessions are interactive webinars using breakout groups and virtual

whiteboards. Panopto recorded sessions from the Library are also available in the Doctoral School Blackboard site.

- The Doctoral School arranged its third Induction for PGRs on 14th May 2020. The Induction was our first online induction event and 13 PGRs attended.
- The DS have also been working on collating resources for Doctoral supervisors and continuously promoting our social media.

6. REPORTS

a. QA & VU

SJ on behalf of MD reported the following:

QA & VU have been issuing vast amount of guidance across the University particularly for teaching and assessment considering the Covid-19 situation. SJ circulated the Covid-19 support and guidance from QAA.

b. College Reports

CoESE : No report

CoAHB : No report

CoHS :

DM reported the following:

- The College have been involved in the forward planning. Data from 3/5 schools shows that 34 candidates will need extensions.
- There is no overwhelming situation with students needing extensions. Most PGRs have been able to adapt.

c. SU Report

HR explained that analysis was under way on the SU annual survey. The student led teaching awards have now completed, with Psychology winning School of the year.

d. KESS2/KESS2 East:

PD explained that the April claim is currently being submitted.

- KESS2 (West) has 511 live projects and KESS2 East has 113 live projects across Wales.
- For KESS2 (West) projects, Bangor has 129 with 86 PhDs and 43 Research Masters.
- For KESS2 East projects, Bangor has 14 PhDs and 1 Research Masters.
- A call will shortly be opened for more Research Masters.

e. ESRC Wales DTP:

DM reported the following:

- Meetings such as the ESRC DTP Board meeting to evaluate the general studentships and meetings to evaluate the postdoctoral fellowships had been organised.
- A mid-term review in November 2019 was largely positive. Questions about equality diversity and inclusion as well as interdisciplinary studentships were raised. The DTP wrote a response letter on these points and the ESRC confirmed that we are in line.

- Collaborative studentships were reviewed, Bangor has been awarded three in Bilingualism Support, Exercise Science and Management in Business. In the general studentships three out of four were funded in Management & Business, Sport and Exercise Science and Psychology.

Some changes happening:

- Instead of each pathway putting forward three potential studentships, there will be four. This will be trialed for a year to see if that favour's some pathways over others. So, BU really needs to get some high-quality applications.
- Instead of going for the collaborative studentships, which would open bidding over the summer and then finish in October, both the collaborative and the general studentships will happen in the spring of next year because of the Covid-19 situation.

f. NERC DTP: no report now

g. AI CDT: The report from Jonathan Roberts on the AIMLAC CDT was circulated. Main points are:

- The AIMLAC UKRI Centre for Doctoral Training in Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning & Advanced Computing is continuing well.
- The CDT is led by Swansea University and brings together academics from Aberystwyth, Bangor, Bristol, Cardiff and Swansea focusing around AI, Machine learning and Advanced Computing.
- 2020 start - successfully completed recruitment for the October 2020 start. November 2019 invited proposal submissions; shortlisted five topics and supervisors; went to national adverts (incl. findaphd). Had ten applicants who submitted by the deadline. Shortlisted four for interview. Interviews took place on 9th March and two PhD studentships were offered to start in October 2020.
- COVID-19 risks.
 - Completed the risk mitigation details, like other projects.
 - Risks are low in most instances, because our research can be achieved remotely and by computer.
 - Purchasing items needed for the research, such as laptops, or specialist books were identified by the students as being an issue.
 - Different working conditions, and awareness of wellbeing of students and staff involved and health and safety of computing use, was also identified.
 - Also planning for a potential remote start, for the new intake in October.

h. Nuclear CDT – no report now

7. PGR Administration: Comments/ Issues

The Chair commented that there have been many issues with respect to accessing PGR data such as to identify who are self-funded, who are funded by Schools, those who are funded by external funders. Information is required for the DS and other departments for reporting. It is equally important to gather information about staff and supervision.

Discussions are ongoing to rationalise and find a one stop shop for PGR data so that this can be accessible to everybody, as appropriate.

The Chair invited discussion from members about this issue. SJ raised issues on inaccuracies with Banner data and its implications on the QA & VU.

BH commented that they have issues not being able to identify the principal supervisor from the other members of the supervisory team. She added that the Library and Archives service would support improvement of the Banner data.

8. Discussion on

i. Maternity/paternity policy for PGRs

This was covered under Agenda item 5.b.iii.

ii. Parking for PGRs

The chair updated that we are awaiting a response on this matter from Estates, and suggested that temporary passes could be issued from individual schools.

9. SPECIAL CASES/ Appeals awareness

No cases to report

10.AOB

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be scheduled for next academic year.