

H/02/26/02

**Meeting of the Senate Researcher Experience Committee  
18 March 2019, 14:00  
Cuillin Room, Charles Stewart House**

**Present**

Dr Antony Maciocia (Convener), Dean of Postgraduate Research, College of Science and Engineering

Dr Paddy Hadoke, Director of Postgraduate Research and Early Career Researcher Experience, College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine (CMVM)

Prof. Stephen Bowd, Dean of Postgraduate Studies, College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

Dr Sharon Maguire, Head of Doctoral Education, Institute for Academic Development (IAD)

Dr Caroline Proctor, School of Biological Sciences

Ms Kirsty Woomble, College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

Ms Megan Brown, Academic Engagement Co-Ordinator, Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA)

Prof. Jamie Pearce, Scottish Graduate School for Social Sciences

**Apologies**

Mr Daniel Dodd, Postgraduate Research Student Representative, CMVM

Ms Nichola Kett, Academic Services

Mr Tom Ward, Director of Academic Services

**Attending**

Ms June Bell, Human Resources

Dr Adam Bunni, Academic Services

Ms Sarah Harvey, Service Excellence Programme (Item 5)

Mr Brian Butler, Service Excellence Programme (Item 5)

Mr Andy Shanks, Director of Student Wellbeing (Item 4)

At the outset of the meeting, the Convener proposed that those attending the Committee to deliver presentations (Mr Andy Shanks, Mr Brian Butler, Ms Sarah Harvey) should be invited to present to the Committee prior to the commencement of the formal business outlined in the Agenda.

**1. Mental Health Training for Supervisors**

The Director of Student wellbeing presented an update on Mental Health Training at the University. He noted that the University was seeing increasing numbers of students declaring mental health difficulties on application, and experiencing increased demand for Counselling Services and the Student Disability Service in relation to student mental health. This training was delivered by University of Edinburgh staff. It had initially been developed for Personal Tutors, but it had been adapted and was now available for those acting in Supervisory capacities and Student Support Officers. The Director of Student Wellbeing noted that the Student Mental Health Strategy was undergoing review, with this review having an expected completion date of two months from now. He also noted that the Professional Development Framework for staff delivering Student Support had specific items

within it on mental health. The Convener thanked the Director of Student Wellbeing and noted that it was encouraging to see attention being given to this area.

## **2. Service Excellence Programme – Outline Proposals**

Mr Butler and Ms Harvey presented the Committee with the aspects of current Service Excellence Project work with relevance to Postgraduate Research. This outlined that three key areas of engagement were envisioned, with students relying on Schools to be the main source of information. There would also be specialist services, and 'Student Hubs', which would be consolidated transactional administrative teams. Ms Harvey noted that there were specific intricacies related to Postgraduate Research that the Service Excellence Programme were aware of the need to explore further. The need for set milestones, which were visible to students and staff, and the need for students to have the ability to access important information in one place, were noted. The outline proposals also included improvements to the Annual Review process, changes in thesis submission towards an online model with no hard copy submission where appropriate, and examination of the rules around restricting access to theses. Ms Harvey noted that there would be a 6-8 week planning period where prioritisation of this workload would happen. Service Excellence colleagues were working closely with Academic Services in relation to the interaction between their proposals and existing University policies and procedures.

The Committee asked where the governance of these processes would sit if Service Excellence were to cease. Ms Harvey noted that ownership and ongoing maintenance of any proposed changes were matters that were being considered.

The Committee noted that it felt it would be beneficial if Postgraduate Research were to have its own standalone hub, or that there should be specific Postgraduate Research knowledge within any hub. The Convener noted that some PhD students within the institution were also members of staff, which added a layer of complexity to any kind of transactional interaction. The Convener noted that he and Ms Harvey were due to meet to discuss PGR Boards of Examiners, and would provide an update to the Committee following this.

**ACTION – AM to provide update to Committee at next meeting**

## **3. Minutes of the Meeting held on 25 January 2019**

The Committee approved the minutes as an accurate record of the previous meeting

## **4. Matters Arising**

### **Postgraduate Research Experience Survey – Institutional Questions**

The Convener noted that the question that REC had agreed on had been included in the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES), and that PRES was currently underway.

### **Old Kirk Project**

The Convener noted that he would contact Estates regarding the progress of the Old Kirk Project and provide REC with an update.

## **ACTION – AM to contact Gary Jebb**

### **Enlightenment Scholarships**

The Convener advised that the group tasked with oversight of these Scholarships will continue to operate, albeit with a reduced membership. The Convener further advised that further guidance was required in relation to how the governance of these Scholarships would work going forward.

### **External Examiners (PGR) Right to Work**

The Convener noted that the current position was that if an External Examiner was registered as self-employed there was no need for right to work checks to be carried out, unless the External Examiner was from overseas. HR would provide further guidance on this.

## **ACTION – HR to follow up (Linda Criggie)**

## **5. Convener's Communications**

The Convener noted that there was the possibility that UKVI may be relaxing its position regarding allowing Tier 4 sponsorship for part-time PhD students. Ms Woomble noted that Dr Lisa Kendall had been involved in discussions up to this point.

## **ACTION – Ms Woomble to ask Dr Kendall to provide an update to AM**

The Convener informed the Committee that Fee Strategy Group would be having a discussion regarding the fees levied against overseas students who are awarded scholarships by the University. These may be capped at the Home/EU rate in future.

In relation to PhD with integrated study, the Convener noted that there had been concern voiced by some Schools regarding the need to set up parallel programmes in multiple Schools for a single CDT.

## **6. Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021**

The paper on the Research Excellence Framework had been noted as 'To Follow' on the agenda, but as a result of staff illness this paper was not available to the Committee.

## **7. Excellence in Doctoral Research and Career Development: Progress Reports June 2018**

Dr Maguire presented the paper. It was noted that there was a consensus that supervisors should undertake mandatory training every five years, and that this was reflected in current practice and the updated regulations. Dr Maguire asked the Committee to discuss new supervisor training, annual online training, and development of principles. Dr Maguire explained that the recommendation that new supervisors undertake training within six months of taking on supervision was not being implemented this year as further exploration is needed to determine whether this can be implemented practicably.

The committee agreed that it was important that the content of any training for new supervisors was appropriate, and that it was suitable for new supervisors in all disciplines without being too resource intensive. In relation to online training, or current annual training models, it was noted that practice varied across the

University's three Colleges, but each had mechanisms to ensure that this was attended by staff taking on supervision.

The Committee agreed that it would be useful to set up a sub-group that would look at the implementation plan and development of principles for what training should include. The Committee formally approved the paper.

**ACTION – Dr Maguire and AM to consider membership and needs of sub-group and take forward**

## **8. Review of the structure of the Senate Committees**

Dr Bunni presented the paper. The Committee noted that the paper presented a number of options for REC, which included the transfer of REC's current remit on strategic PGR matters to Senate Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) and REC's current responsibility for Early Career Researcher matters into the Research Policy Group. It also included maintaining the status quo, with no change to REC's current remit and membership, whilst making modest changes to the Senate Curriculum and Student Progression Committee (CSPC) membership to ensure expertise on PGR matters in relation to PGR policy and regulations. Additionally, a proposed change to Research Policy Group's (RPG) remit to incorporate both PGR and Early Career Researcher matters, and a change to RPG's reporting lines so that it reported to Senate whilst maintaining close links to the University Executive was included.

The Committee noted the potential benefit to PGR matters should these be represented on other committees, especially LTC. The Convener noted the requirement for clear structures that ensured that PGR matters were given due attention.

The Convener noted that a common solution to similar matters within LERU institutions was the establishment of an umbrella organisation such as a Doctoral College.

The Committee agreed that, of the proposals presented in the paper, the most suitable option was likely the transfer of remit to LTC, provided that assurances were given about LTC's capacity to handle PGR matters, both in terms of expertise and the volume of business.

The Committee agreed that matters relating to Early Career Researchers had not generally been given sufficient focus by REC in its business. The Convener noted that Early Career Researchers were members of staff. Members of the Committee suggested that, as such, matters relating to Early Career Researchers might be best considered by a sub-committee of People Committee. The Committee noted that RPG did not appear to have a focus on staff development, and may not be an appropriate home for Early Career Researcher matters without a change of its role.

The Committee agreed in principle, noting the need for a clear structure that ensured Early Career Research matters would be given appropriate oversight, that the merging of REC's responsibilities for strategic PGR matters into LTC was the preferred proposal.

## **9. Senate Committee Planning**

Dr Bunni presented the paper. He noted that the Committee were being asked to think about continuing pieces of work, or urgent matters. The Convener noted that in light of the previous agenda item, and what the Committee had agreed as a result of that, that the Committee wanted to ensure that Early Career Researcher matters were addressed. The Convener noted that PGR student numbers were increasing, and that this required consideration in the context of matters of careers, employability, and student support. The Convener noted that a planned review of the structures involved in the management and support of PGR students had been delayed; the Committee agreed that this ought to be a priority for the coming year, and would support further exploration of the idea of a Doctoral College.

The Convener also noted the Concordat and Early Career Researchers as important agenda items for the coming Academic Year.

#### **10. MSc by Research Dissertations: Resubmissions**

Dr Bunni presented the paper. He noted that the MSc(R) Dissertation had become the only piece of work offered by the University for which there was no means to address failure, in light of recent changes to regulations surrounding the resubmission of taught MSc Dissertations or Research Projects. The Convener noted that it was useful to have this flexibility, and the Committee confirmed that they were happy to approve the proposed regulations, which would be considered by CSPC in May.

#### **11. Postgraduate Assessment Regulations for Research Degrees 2019/20**

Dr Bunni presented the paper. He noted that, apart from the MSc by Research dissertation resubmission that had already been discussed, the only other substantive change was clarification around outcomes regarding resubmission for PhD's. The regulations currently did not contain sufficient clarity on the status of a resubmission that subsequently failed. The changes to the regulations clarified that, should a resubmission of a PhD fail, a candidate could be considered for an exit award.

The Committee confirmed that they were content for these changes in regulation to be sent to the May meeting of CSPC for approval.

#### **12. External Engagement**

##### **League of European Research Universities (LERU)**

The Convener noted that he had attended the most recent LERU event in Trinity, and would circulate the report to the Committee. The next meeting of LERU would be held at Lund University in Sweden.

##### **UK Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE)**

There was an upcoming meeting of UKCGE in April. It was noted that Supervisory accreditation would be discussed at this meeting.

##### **Coimbra**

There was an upcoming meeting of Coimbra in June.

##### **Network of Universities from European Capitals (UNICA)**

There would be a UNICA Summer School in September, which the Dean of Postgraduate Studies (CMVM) would attend.

#### **Universitas 21**

The Convener noted that the most recent Universitas 21 meeting had overlapped with LERU, and as such, there was no update from Universitas 21.

#### **13. Report from Knowledge Strategy Committee: 18 January 2019**

The committee noted the paper. The Committee discussed the item on distance PhD study. It was noted that the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies were keen to become involved in this but had found it difficult to recruit.

#### **14. Any Other Business**

Ms Brown noted that the Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA) Teaching Award nominations closed in seven days' time, and reminded the Committee that there was a 'Best Supervisor' category. Colleagues were encouraged to promote the awards through appropriate channels.

Stuart Fitzpatrick, Academic Services  
19 March 2019