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The University of Edinburgh

Senatus Researcher Experience Committee

7 December 2017

Excellence in Doctoral Education and Career Development: Progress Reports May - December 2017

Executive Summary

This paper gives an overview of the progress made from May 2017 to December 2017 for all areas of the Excellence Programme. Detailed updates are then given for work stream 1 (supervisor training and support) and work stream 2 (mentoring). These include progress to date and proposed next steps. The committee is requested (as the Programme Board) to discuss progress and approve proposed next steps where appropriate. Separate papers have been tabled for work stream 2 (wellbeing) and for work stream 3 (personal and professional development record). Further information on the Programme is available here: <http://www.ed.ac.uk/academic-services/projects/excellence-in-doctoral-education>

How does this align with the University / Committee's strategic plans and priorities?

The paper aligns with the University Strategic Objective of Leadership in Research. It also aligns with the Committee priority of discussing options for taking forward the postgraduate research enhancement work.

Action requested

The committee is requested to comment on, discuss progress to date and, where appropriate, approve proposed next steps for the Programme.

How will any action agreed be implemented and communicated?

The paper includes indicative timelines for proposed next steps. Actions will then be communicated by the Academic and Programme lead to all appropriate stakeholders.

Resource / Risk / Compliance

1. Resource implications (including staffing)

It has been agreed that the work included in this Programme can be supported at present by existing staffing resource in the Institute for Academic Development (IAD) and Academic Services. If the work identifies further resource implications, early discussions will be undertaken with relevant units.

2. Risk assessment

No major risks identified

3. Equality and Diversity

Equality Impact Assessments will be undertaken as necessary

4. Freedom of information

The paper is open

Key words

Doctoral education, supervision, mentoring

Originator of the paper

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Excellence in Doctoral Education and Career Development Programme: Progress Report December 2017

Overview

In February 2017, REC approved the commencement of a comprehensive Programme of work to investigate, map and enhance the PGR student experience across the University. This Programme comprises three interrelated work streams.

1. supervisor training and support
2. mentorship and wellbeing
3. personal and professional development record

Details of these and the background to the Programme can be found here:

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/papera-excellenceprogramme.pdf>

Progress Reports from May 2017 can be found here: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/academic-services/projects/excellence-in-doctoral-education/progress>

Summary Table of Progress made in all areas of the Programme May – December 2017

Area of work	Summary of Progress May 2017- December 2017	Further information
Communication and Consultation	Progress made in both areas	Further details in this paper
Work Stream 1: Supervisor Training and Support	PGR supervisor network set up, enhanced programme of support for supervisors being piloted 2017/18. Enhanced communication. Initial steps taken on more efficient recording of attendance at supervisor briefings.	Further details in this paper
Work Stream 2: Mentorship and Wellbeing	Progress made in both areas Report on 'Postgraduate Research Student Wellbeing Strategies' completed and considered by the Mental Health Strategy Group.	Further update in this paper on mentoring Separate paper on actions stemming from the report on 'Postgraduate Research Student Wellbeing Strategies'
Work Stream 3: Personal and Professional Development Record	Task group concluded and final report submitted to REC (December 2017)	Separate paper

REC is requested to discuss, comment on and, where appropriate, approve:

- The general progress made by the Programme and future plans for communication and consultation
- The proposed next steps for work stream 1
- The proposed next steps for work stream 2 (mentoring)

Communication and Consultation

Communication

The Programme webpages can be found here: <http://edin.ac/2pFy7zo> These will be updated as the work progresses.

This report will be shared with College Committees and the progress slides will be highlighted in the PGR supervisor and PhD student newsletters in early 2018.

Consultation

In August/ September 2017 two discussion groups were held with PGR students. The report from these can be found at the end of this document (Appendix One). The outcomes have been used to inform the work of work streams 2 and 3.

In June 2017, a launch event was held for a new PGR Supervisors network. This was attended by 35 people and the outcomes from the discussions have been used to as the basis for an enhanced programme of events and support for supervisors over 2017/18.

The task group for work stream 3 (Personal and Professional Development Record) has consulted widely over the January to October period). This included student/ staff consultation. Further details can be found in the task group report.

Future

In January 2018, IAD will host a Doctoral Training and Support Forum for anyone involved in doctoral training and support (academic and administrative staff). This will give an overview of the Excellence programme and will focus on sharing practice and discussion in three areas (mentoring and wellbeing, supervision and tutoring and demonstrating).

Further discussion groups to be held with PGR students in late spring 2018 to raise awareness and focus on specific areas of progress.

REC is asked to comment on the general progress made to date and future plans
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Work stream one update: Supervisor training and support

In May 2017, REC approved a set of next steps for this work stream. This table gives an overview of progress for each of these steps and proposes further actions for the period December 2017 onwards.

Agreed in May 2017	Progress	Next steps
Revision of IAD webpages for doctoral supervisors to begin to create a 'hub' of dedicated resources and support. This may involve a Learn resource for supervisors. ON TRACK	IAD webpages revised and there are now dedicated PGR supervisor pages / email address. First IAD PGR Supervisor newsletter sent out in October and will be sent out three times per year (Oct/Jan/June). https://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development/research-roles/supervisors	Resources and tools to be added to webpages throughout the January to May 2018 period.
Identify further training and support needs through consultation with the PGR supervisor network/ results from CROS and PIRLS 2017 to draw up a programme of activity for 2017/18 ON TRACK	Programme of pilot activity for PGR supervisors throughout 2017/18. Includes spotlight on.... Events (co-supervision/ mental health and wellbeing support for PGRs, supervising international PGR students), informal discussion groups and practical approaches workshops.	Programme to be evaluated in summer 2018.
Strengthen the central support for compulsory supervisor briefings through sharing of resources and accessible checklist ON TRACK	Meeting held with Deans in August 2017 to discuss enhancements to supervisor briefings	Continue to build on resources – including example responses for case studies.
Further explore and scope development of an online training resource for research supervision using the Karolinska Institute model as a starting point. REVISED TIMELINE AND ACTION FOR REC	Initial scoping suggests that this should be explored and potentially developed as part of a wider approach which includes a framework for supervisor continuing professional development. This would include an online training resource.	It is proposed that this work is coordinated through a short life task group – CPD framework for PGR supervisors. If REC agrees to this, an outline of the task group, including aims, and composition to be presented to REC in January 2018.
Consult with Colleges (through committees) about the 5 year rule for renewing supervisor training REVISED	This will form part of the wider review of the Code of Practice	This will form part of the wider review of the Code of Practice
Explore and scope options for recording compulsory supervisory briefings online	Explored but as yet no satisfactory solution identified	Continue to explore options and report to REC in May 2018

ONGOING		
Work with EUSA to identify three supervisors from the Teaching Award shortlists for institutional entry into the Times Higher Outstanding Supervisor of the Year Award COMPLETED	Decided to submit one entry only (winner of the Students' Association award).	Work with Students' Association to embed this as usual practice from 2018
Continue to benchmark and map examples of good practice both externally and internally and include in this a review of relevant research literature ON TRACK	Ongoing	Ongoing. To be included in workshops on supervision and in online resources.

REC is asked to consider and approve the proposed next steps for Work Stream 1

Work stream two update: Mentorship and Wellbeing

The work for this work stream has been divided into two areas, mentorship and wellbeing. In May 2017, REC approved a set of next steps for the mentoring work stream. This table shows an overview of progress for each of these steps and proposes further actions for the period December 2017 onwards.

A separate paper has been tabled for this meeting which outlines progress and actions stemming from the report commissioned by IAD into, 'Postgraduate Research Student Wellbeing Strategies'.

Agreed in May 2017	Progress	Next Steps
Explore possibility of developing a centrally hosted webpage which communicates the benefits of mentoring, schemes and resources available to PGR students. This would link to available schemes in their School/ subject area. ON TRACK	To be considered alongside a proposed wellbeing section on the IAD PGR webpages as part of the actions from the report into wellbeing.	Progress to be reported to REC in May 2018
Develop, in consultation with support services and relevant Schools/ subject areas, clear and formal guidance for anyone acting as a mentor for a PGR student in a pastoral capacity. ON TRACK	Background work on mapping thesis committee structures etc. undertaken in academic year 2017/18 (see May progress reports). Mentoring also discussed with student discussion groups.	To be further discussed at the Doctoral Training and Support forum in January and guidance developed in consultation with Schools/ Colleges Jan- Aug 2018.

Work in partnership with the Students' Association to build a clear case for supporting the further extension of peer mentoring to postgraduate research students. ON TRACK	Proposal for a six month joint (IAD/ Students' Association) post to expand this work has been submitted to USG for consideration.	Await outcome of proposal to determine further actions.
Develop central resources for evaluation of mentoring schemes which can be made available to staff involved in mentoring schemes. ON TRACK	Forms part of the joint IAD/ Students' Association proposal detailed above.	Await outcome of proposal to determine further actions.
Continue dialogue with Development and Alumni and the Careers Service regarding the new student alumni platform, to assist with establishing the requirements for PGRs. ON TRACK	Dialogue continues.	Any updates will be communicated to REC in due course.

REC is asked to discuss and approve the proposed next steps for work stream 2 (mentoring)

Work stream three update: Personal and Professional Development Record

A separate paper has been tabled for this meeting which reports on the activities and recommendations of the task group for this work stream.

Appendix One: Student Discussion Groups – report

Doctoral Student Experience focus groups held in August and September 2017 as part of the Excellence in Doctoral Education and Career Development Programme of work.

Description

This is how the groups were advertised:

Doctoral Student Experience Discussion Groups

The University has recently embarked on a comprehensive Programme of work looking into the student experience for postgraduate researchers at the University. <http://edin.ac/2pFy7zo> This aims to map current experience and provision, to identify and share good practice and to identify gaps and suggested enhancements. It focuses on three areas: supervisor training and support, mentorship and wellbeing and personal and professional development record.

As current doctoral students (at any stage) you are invited to take part in these discussions, and help shape proposals and future work on the doctoral student experience. All information shared in these groups will be fully anonymised in any reports.

Coffee and tea will be provided.

Participation

Two groups were held, one in the central area and one at Kings Buildings. A total of 13 students attended. These were a mix of disciplines (all three Colleges represented) and all stages (from one month to 4th year).

Observations and outcomes

Reported positives of experience at Edinburgh

- Quite good office facilities
- Support staff from graduate office were very knowledgeable about different aspects throughout the programme
- Freedom/space to follow ideas/project in new directions
- The school office has been ready to help with any issues I've had
- My lab colleagues have been very warm and welcoming Supervisors (2)
- Independence and flexibility
- Access to teaching experience and to teaching accreditation (EdTA)
- Central support services
- Study space at some Schools
- Support in some Schools (eg. Economics) through discussion groups and research grants
- Having two supervisors
- Online database. Library
- IAD

Reported negatives of experience at Edinburgh

- Not clear: role of advisor vs supervisor
- My supervisor left at the end of 3rd year – it took so long for the school to sort things
- Lack of non-project related development (or push for it within the department/team)

- Very dark office with no windows
- Not family friendly (at times)
- Variation in experience from student to student
- Courses and activities sometimes are not targeted to relevant audiences
- No recognition of 'small' successes at school level or even supervisory level
- Supervisor support : PhD students feel bottom of the pile (especially this time of year (beginning of academic year))
- Supervisors (2)
- Changes in administrative procedure through the time here
- Teaching workload too much
- Local support services
- Lack of funding
- Difficulty meeting other PG students
- Study space in some Schools (hot-desking only)

Understanding of mentoring / need for support outside supervision (demand and type)

A mentor is:

- Someone that has been through a similar experience to what I have been through or will be going through.
- Someone who offers help, support, guidance (career advice). For me, my supervisor filled this role.
- No idea.
- Someone to give pastoral/professional support.
- A mythological figure that is hard to find but it is possible to find different figures that could combine to make one.
- Someone who guides you/ like a mother bird with baby birds/ a father figure/ someone who doesn't tell you the answers but lets you work it out for yourself/ someone without judgement- connection to you or sphere around you/definition often comes from employment or form experience as UG with 'families' eg. at St Andrews
- Postdocs are one possibility of people who could be mentors but they need training
- Support
- Pastoral support and career support
- A number of supportive figures, rather than one individual
- Thesis committees are supposed to provide this function but departmental politics can create 'us vs them' situations

Support outside supervision:

- For me, I haven't really required anything, but I have had friends who have needed counselling, or would like a mentor in addition to their supervisors. I think who your supervisors are and how regularly you meet them makes a big difference.
- Counselling services are essential
- Information regarding University structure, how things work, who to go to.
- Perhaps a peer-mentor who directs one's enquiries to suitable units of School/University
- More information regarding data collection, safety.

- A mentor
- Positive feedback, looking after well-being
- Ethic of care – what are the values that drive individuals/the institution?
- Professional figures that are not only specialised in your field but also specialised in PhD support.
- Support for sitting at a desk all day – should be like an employee
- Support with finding accommodation
- Informal mentorship – a relationship with another student who is further on in their PhD
- Career coach
- More contact with peers within the same School – Postgraduate social space/ networking spaces and opportunities would be welcome

Challenges of maintaining effective work/life balance

- Thesis publications, finding funding, hunting for jobs, teaching all within 3 years.
- The work is never 'done' – you can always improve it, it's hard to declare a project 'finalised'.
- Family, children, relationship
- Hard to get out of the 'PhD bubble' – interacting with the same people, small social group all of the time.
- Feeling guilty for taking time off, not working.
- The entire system of academic employment – constant perception of needing to 'be productive'.
- Family commitments – things happen in evenings etc.
- Imposter syndrome – pressure put on yourself to achieve to work harder and harder all hours. Uncertainty about annual leave and entitlement. Lack of community – access to peer support network / lack of knowledge or understanding about where to go for help.
- Competitive nature of the PhD and the availability of postdoctoral opportunities
- Leap from Taught MSc to PhD is significant
- Funding is a major issue – extremely difficult to source with very little support
- Lack of mentorship – students seek their own mentors through networking opportunities at conferences and courses
- Lack of positive feedback

Support for personal and professional development at the University

- Variable
- There is a great deal of support out there but not very well signposted or easy to find
- The level of support varies depending on School and supervisors
- There is very little and what is available is difficult to find
- There are a lot of opportunities but they are not made available

Understanding of a doctoral transcript

- Validation on paper from the University would be appreciated
- It would be good for career development
- It would be good for job applications and funding opportunities
- It is a good idea/would be good to have
- It would be a good way to display a student's initiative and passion towards their research

- Not sure how this would work
- I need a certificate
- It would be super important to show that students have initiative and passion towards their research and help equip students with different skills

Tools and approaches to recording personal and professional development (what do you currently use/ what would you like to use?)

Currently use: Annual Review forms, CV, LinkedIn, keep a personal record of achievements

Comments about other ways of recording (such as an online system):

- Don't want to do anything which takes up more time
- Annual review is a good time to do this
- Don't want supervisors to have to do more paperwork and so have less time to supervise
- Not very useful as it would require more time in order to complete the record and there is no obvious incentive

Conclusions

The comments in the groups aligned with the free text comments in PRES 2015 on space, supervision and general experience and highlighted variation in student experience across the institution.

Work stream Two: Mentoring and Wellbeing

General support for peer mentoring, although variation in understanding of what a mentor is and how the relationship can function.

Link made between positive wellbeing and mentoring

Emphasis on the negative effect of isolation and the positive impact of engagement with others and opportunities to interact

Work stream Three: Personal and Professional Development Record

Students use a range of different ways to record their personal and professional development

The annual review forms and discussion were highlighted as a place to record personal and professional development

There was support for a validated transcript or record from the University, especially for students who are thinking of applying for positions overseas

There was a push back against anything which will mean more administration for supervisors as this would take away time from 'actual' supervision