<u>PGR Committee Meeting – 22nd September 2022 (13:00 – 15:00)</u>

1. Welcome and apologies

1.1 Attendees: Patric Bach, Simon Bains, Peter Cserne, Aravinda Guntupalli, Mehmet Kartal, Lucy Leiper, Samantha Miller, Peter Mtika, Graeme Nixon, Audrey Paterson, Claire Ransley (clerk), Kate Smith, Valerie Speirs, Rhiannon Thompson, Ekke Ullner, Philip Ziegler

1.2 Apologies: Robert Findlay, Paul Hallett, Suk-Jun Kim, Melanie McCann, Andrew McKinnon

1.3 Graeme Nixon (GN) welcomed Phil Ziegler (replacing Paul Nimmo), Peter Cserne (replacing Matyas Bodig) and Peter Mtika (replacing Liz Curtis and David Johnson) to the committee.

2. Minutes, action log and matters arising   **PGR 23_01**

2.1 Minutes approved from June committee meeting.

2.2 In relation to thesis submission action points, Simon Bains (SB) outlined he would like to bring a paper to committee to propose submitting e-copy only to align the system with other institutions. Plans for the digital preservation project should be in place by 2023 so would like to request space on agenda at a future committee meeting which was supported by Graeme Nixon (GN).

3. Remit and composition, schedule of business   **PGR 23_02**

3.1 GN provided clarity that he is the UEC representative, and that LL represents QAC.

3.2 SB raised that Library and Special Collections should be amended to the Directorate of Digital and Information Systems (LL updated).

3.3 LL suggested that the Head of PG Admissions and Student Support Representatives should be invited to committee.
LL to contact Student Support and Head of PG Admissions

3.4 GN provided a reminder that School representatives should feed information into School Research Committees.

4. School PGR Items

4.1 Mehmet Kartal (MK) sought clarity on new plagiarism guidance for cases where supervisors might have varying opinions on what should be flagged. GN explained while there might be some differences between disciplines, we must trust supervisors to make judgement calls on plagiarism. Clarity was also provided that the APE process is school based so decisions on how to deal with plagiarism in such cases can be delegated by the Head of School.

4.2 LL updated that PGRS currently has a staff representative from CAD working with the team around academic writing and developing plagiarism training.

4.3 Aravinda Guntupalli (AG) questioned if the university would be providing any financial support to PGR students over the Winter as other universities are doing. GN agreed to raise the topic with Marion Campbell but noted any support is reliant on university finance which following the

stipend increase might be limited. Rhiannon Thompson (RT) added that there is institution wide discussion on how additional support can be provided during cost of living crisis.
Action: GN to discuss ongoing Covid support for PGRs with VP Research

4.4 AG raised that there has been a lot of discussion around training needs for PGRs. Sam Miller (SM) requested that Foresterhill be considered too and for trainings to be hybrid for inclusivity. LL noted that hybrid meetings are generally not preferred but can discuss with schools the best way to manage training between both campuses.

4.5 Peter Cserne (PC) raised concerns about the requirement for students and supervisors to meet in person due to visa regulations where this isn't always possible. Claire Ransley (CR) clarified that when in person meetings aren't possible, individual cases should be discussed with Briony in the Immigration Team for navigating exceptional circumstances.

5.   Review of AY 2021/22   **PGR 23_03**

5.1 LL gave an overview of the admissions numbers and reflected that while home students have dropped, the international students have accounted for stable numbers. Patric Bach (PB) questioned whether this was thought to be a local trend or comparative to wider EU trends where it was generally felt to be applicable across the sector.

5.2 In relation to the Studentships data, PB questioned if nominations can be increased to improve numbers. GN outlined that reputational damage can come from putting forward many applications with little success. LL explained there needs to be a realistic focus on quality of applications noting that Aberdeen's success rate is higher in comparison to Edinburgh and Glasgow.

5.3 LL provided an overview of Change in Circumstances data from 700 applications (excluding MMSN) where the main reasons given were for internships and physical/mental health. It was noted that increased mental health support and awareness to acknowledge when students are struggling will have resulted in increased suspension applications. GN noted that leniency over covid should be considered and that these issues will be starting to be less prominent. PC queried if applications that aren't accepted have been considered in data. CR clarified these will have been considered but that few applications are outright rejected and that some get approved following amendments/further discussion first. Finally, it was raised by Peter Mtika that there isn't separate data for international students so should be considered for future data sets going forward.

6.   PGR Absence Policy   **PGR 23_04**

6.1 LL summarised that as current guidance for absence management is directed towards UG/PGT, there have been requests for a separate policy for PGR students. The importance of knowing when students are off, preventing backdated suspensions and protecting time on the clock are all important considerations of this. It was acknowledged at this point that maternity and paternity leave needs to be referenced within the document.

Action: LL/RT to add reference to maternity and paternity in PGR Absence Policy and clarify communications for absence 7days+.

6.2 SM questioned if the absences reported on Student Hub (7+days) can be communicated to school staff so they are aware. LL noted this is being investigated.

6.3 PB commented on the issues of students losing funding while on suspension and LL clarified students who are UKRI funded can access sick leave but acknowledged general funding terms are out of the University's control.

7. Doctoral Reps Group Report

7.1 not presented during the session but students are currently working on proposal and will be kept as a standing agenda item.

Action: PGR Reps to present at proposal at next committee meeting

8. Revision of 6, 18 and 30 M forms for approval   PGR 23_05

8.1 RT provided an overview of the tailored review forms for each stage of the journey and thanked committee members for feedback so far on the documents.

8.2 Patric Bach requested to share the forms with student representatives prior to being finalised which was supported by RT.

Action: PB to discuss updated review forms with Student Representatives prior to being finalised.

8.3 Ekke queried if the new forms are based on individual timelines for students which was confirmed as being the case. RT clarified forms are sent based on each student's month of study from their start date.

8.4 PC sought clarity if review forms are only seen by the schools when things go wrong and was informed by CR that the Engagement Team return these when completed to the school. While the team are looking to reduce the turnaround time on these, the school can always contact the Engagement Team if specific forms are required.

8.5 The committee approved the updated forms for use by PGRS (pending feedback from student representatives).

9. Discussion point – formal monitoring for PGR engagement

9.1 LL requested initial thoughts from the committee for updating guidance for formal monitoring of PGR students as the current guidance outline only specifies it's use for visa requirements. It was discussed that issues of non engagement should be factored into robust criteria to address issues like attendance of meetings and engaging with emails.

9.2 Kate Smith agreed that it would be important to have criteria outlined for what non engagement looks like and a formal process for how to deal with these situations.

9.3 Sam Miller noted that care will be required for creating the communication content. LL agreed with this and noted PGRS encourage a supportive email for PGCs to send first to students.

Action: LL/RT to present paper at December committee for PGR Monitoring Guidance.

10. AOCB

10.1   SB raised that he is looking to develop spaces in the library and encouraged committee members to consider the needs of PGR students and how changes in the library can strategically be implemented.

11. Routine updates to Code of Practice   **PGR 23_06**

11.1   LL noted to the committee that some routine updates have been made to the Code of Practise including the requirements for supervisory meetings prior to the full reworking of the document.

12. Guidelines to support disabled PGRs   **PGR 23_07**

12.1 LL updated the committee that following feedback from students, disability guidelines have been created as most provisions in place are generally steered towards UG. It was noted that the Student Support and Experience committee have also reviewed the document and supported its use for early intervention for students.

12.2 Kate Smith raised concerns over students getting provisions in place through Student Support but that there isn't any mechanism in place for this information being passed on. LL noted there is ongoing work to improve links with Student Support and that DSA processes are being tightened up to put support in quickly.

Action: LL to put Disability Guidance on the radar of school administrators/managers and link information within Handbooks.

12.3 GN thanked all members for their input and informed that the committee would next be convening in December.