RESEARCH DEGREES PROGRAMMES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2015

Present: Professor R Deem (Chair), Professor D Anderberg, Mr M Bazargan, Ms A Borrett, Dr L Christie, Mr A Clarke, Professor J Harris, Professor P Hogg, Professor B Langford, Professor G Symon

With: Dr M Beck (Secretary), Mrs D Salsbury (Assistant Secretary), Mrs L Wilkinson (Item 3 only)

Apologies: Professor M Collinson, Dr R Dietmann, Ms Y Liu, Ms A Sendall, Dr S Wright

1. CHAIR’S WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and apologies received were also noted. 15/001

2. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

2.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2014 (M 14/082 - M 14/114) (RDPC/15/01) were confirmed as an accurate record. 15/002

2.2 Action Points

Min.14/89: The responses to the 2014 PGR student experience survey have been done, but a formal response on library and related matters still needs to be sent out to all PGR students. It was noted that in future one response on all matters will be sent to PGR students from the Doctoral School.

Action: Secretary to contact the Director of Library Services to ensure that a formal response to the 2014 PGR student experience survey on library and related matters is sent out to all PGR students.

Min. 14/94: The Student Administration Manager confirmed that the PGR student recruitment data produced by the Student Administration Centre and given to the last RDPC was correct.

Min. 14/104: The Planning and Resources Committee recommended that research students on full studentships who go on maternity leave would be entitled to financial support for the full six months. A policy on maternity pay eligibility will go to Academic Board for approval.

Min. 14/105: The Admissions Office does not currently hold data on how many applicants there are each year with an external maintenance-only award and how many had gone elsewhere if they were not granted a fee waiver. However, the Admissions Office reported that they would consider how to set up a decliner’s survey in order to capture this and other data in future.

Min. 14/105: The Planning and Resources Committee agreed that students with an external maintenance-only award from an organisation (ie not self-funded) could be granted a fee waiver in the event that the College allows fee
waivers to become a recognised way of funding research students.

Status of remaining action points: For details of actions completed or for further progress on all other outstanding action points, please see Status Column on Action Point schedule at the end of these Minutes.

2.4 The Committee agreed that where students who initially submitted an incomplete or unfinished thesis which one or more examiners refused to examine resubmitted the thesis, one of the following outcomes could be given at the (de facto) second submission at the end of the viva:
   a) The candidate has satisfied them unconditionally in the examination for the PhD degree; or
   b) The candidate is required to make minor amendments to the thesis specified by them within three months; or
   c) The candidate is required to make moderate amendments to the thesis specified by them within a period of up to nine months; or
   d) The examiners determine that the student has not satisfied them in the examination.

3. PLACEMENTS

The Committee received a briefing paper (RDPC/15/03) and a presentation on the provision of placements and internships for PhD students at the College from the Director of Careers and Employability. The Director of Careers and Employability explained that a placement would ideally need to complement, and not disrupt, a student’s PhD studies. The placement should also be at the right level of skills for a PhD student. Additionally the employer would need to be educated about how to manage the placement. One of the positive advantages of internships is that research students are encouraged to explore the range of employability opportunities outside of academia. The Associate Dean (Doctoral School) and Director of Careers and Employability will discuss whether the Doctoral School and the Careers and Employability Service could jointly produce information on placements and internships for research students.

4. RESEARCH STUDENTS ON TIER 4 VISAS

4.1 The Chair emphasised that a CAS (Confirmation of Acceptance of Studies) would not be issued for every UKVI visa holding student who requested one as this could jeopardise the College’s Highly Trusted Sponsor status. Students holding Tier 4 visas who request an extension may be eligible to apply for a new CAS; however, this would not be automatic and would be agreed on a case-by-case basis. Where students have to make changes to the thesis after the viva, the College will not normally support an application for a new CAS but will require the student to complete the required amendments in their home country, returning to the UK on a visitor visa for the viva. Where students need access to department facilities such as laboratories during the resubmission period, requests for a new CAS will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

4.2 Students are not permitted to work more than 20 hours per week. Supervisors need to be reminded of this and monitor it carefully particularly for all students, including those holding Tier 4 visas so that they do not breach their visa conditions.
5. ROLE OF THE ADVISOR

The Committee received a paper on the role of the advisor in different departments (RDPC/15/04). The Chair noted that there was inconsistency across the College in the role of the advisor, varying between a pastoral role, a second supervisor, and an external assessor. However, the advisor cannot be an external assessor because of the advisor’s connection to the student. The Chair considered that all departmental PGR student handbooks should have one description of what the advisor does. The Committee proposed that the advisor should ideally:

(i) be the second supervisor;
(ii) provide extra support for the student;
(iii) read chapters produced by the student and provide feedback;
(iv) meet with the student;
(v) attend upgrades and annual reviews;
(vi) provide additional pastoral care for the student.

The proposal will be discussed at the next Directors of Graduate Studies Forum and then taken to Academic Board.

Action: Secretary to prepare a paper on the proposed role of the advisor for consultation at the Directors of Graduate Studies Forum.

6. PGR STUDENT REGISTRATIONS 2014-15

The Committee received the December 2014 count of new entrants and all research students across the college (RDPC/15/05). Students in their writing up year were not included in the figures so the numbers underestimate how many research students we have.

Action: Student Administration Representative to liaise with SDU to provide the December count figures to include students in their writing up year.

7. MSC BY RESEARCH IN BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES

The Committee considered a proposal from the School of Biological Sciences to give students award classifications, and to set a pass mark for taught courses for the MSc by Research in Biological Sciences (RDPC/15/06). The Committee agreed that this would only be permitted if the programme was regarded as a taught postgraduate degree, not as a research degree, and subject to PGT regulations.

Action: Vice-Principal (Research and Enterprise) and Dean of Science to inform the School of this decision.

8. DOCTORAL TRAINING PARTNERSHIPS/CENTRES

The Committee received the following update reports: (i) ESRC SE DTC Annual Report; (ii) AHRC TECHNE Annual Report; (iii) EPSRC CDT Cyber Security Report for RDPC; and (iv) London NERC DTP Report for RDPC (RDPC/15/07a-d).

It was agreed that the Chair should write a paper for Academic Board suggesting a proper process for handling future bids for DTPs/DTCs and
setting out a requirement for each DTP/DTC to report annually to RDPC.

**Action:** The Chair to write a paper for Academic Board suggesting a proper process for handling future bids for DTPs/DTCs and setting out a requirement for each DTP/DTC to report annually to RDPC.

9. **ROLE OF RESEARCH STUDENTS IN RELATION TO REF**

The Committee noted that currently research students contribute to the REF by the number of theses completed, and the number of students an institution has. The RDP money from HEFCE towards the costs of supervising HEU research students is also partly dependent on the QR score. But interestingly and in REF 2014 where an impact case study relied on work completed by a research student, this was disallowed by REF panels. The whole issue of research students and REF is due to be discussed at the UK Council for Graduate Education Residential for Directors of Graduate Schools in Bristol at the end of February and the Dean and Associate Dean of the Doctoral School will report back on this discussion at the next meeting of the Committee.

**Action:** The Dean and Associate Dean of the Doctoral School will report back on this UKCGE discussion about research students and REF at the next meeting of the Committee.

10. **QAA CONSULTATION ON DOCTORAL CHARACTERISTICS**

The Committee received the QAA draft revised version of the Doctoral Degree Characteristics and noted that the consultation closes at the end of February. Feedback should be sent to the Head of Academic Quality and Policy.

**Action:** Head of Academic Quality and Policy to circulate the QAA draft revised version of the Doctoral Degree Characteristics for consultation to Directors of Graduate Studies.

11. **SUB-GROUP FOR HIGHER EDUCATION REVIEW PREPARATION**

The Committee noted that a Sub-Group for Higher Education Review Preparation would be set up and that volunteers from the Committee to sit on the Sub-Group were required. The Chair noted that it would be useful to have a representative from each faculty on the Sub-Group.

**Action:** Secretary to circulate request for volunteers to sit on the Sub-Group for Higher Education Review Preparation.

12. **LOGGING SUPERVISION MEETINGS CENTRALLY**

The Chair reported that some institutions use PebblePad or other software for the purpose of logging dates of supervision meetings and brief details of supervisory meetings; these software products enable students and supervisors to input data which then produces a central record for the institution and the department (for authorised users only eg DoGS, PGR administrator etc). The Chair is currently in discussion with IT Services to investigate whether the College has existing in-house software that can facilitate logging supervision meetings centrally.
STANDING ITEMS

13. DIRECTORS OF GRADUATE STUDIES FORUM
The Committee noted that the next meeting of the Directors of Graduate Studies Forum is scheduled for 10th February 2015. 15/021

14. STUDENT ISSUES
There were no issues to report. 15/022

15. TRAINING
There were no issues to report. 15/023

16. DOCTORAL SCHOOL
There were no issues to report. 15/024

17. FACULTY RESEARCH ISSUES
There were no issues to report. 15/025

18. DATE OF NEXT MEETING
The Committee noted the next meeting will take place on Thursday 7 May 2015 at 2pm in Room FE139. 15/026

19. ANY OTHER BUSINESS
(i) Special Parking Permits for Late Lab Work
The issue of providing parking permits for students undertaking late night lab work who did not want to walk a long way across campus in the dark was raised. The Associate Dean (Doctoral School) reported that he was working to resolve the matter. 15/027

(ii) Double-Sided Thesis Printing
The Committee considered a request to permit double-sided printing of theses. The reasoning for requesting this was: (i) it would enhance readability; (ii) the final pdf versions of included publications as typeset by the journal are often designed for two-sided printing; (iii) it would reduce paper waste; (iii) the hard copy of the thesis would be lighter and more portable; and (iv) it would reduce space required for storage of the final hard copy.

However, since journal articles are often published online it should not always be necessary to print double-sided in order to pdf the article. The Committee also considered that where an examiner requires a hard copy of a bound thesis, the margins at the binding edge may be problematic with a double-sided copy. The Student Administration Manager confirmed that candidates may request the option to print double-sided in the ‘Alternative Format’ section of the ‘Entry Form for MPhil/PhD Examination’. It was therefore agreed that such requests would be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. 15/028

15/029
(iii) BBSRC-Funded Students Undertaking Required Placements

The issue of the requirement for BBSRC-funded students to undertake a placement for three months was raised, with the proposal that these students should take an interruption of studies during their placement. It was confirmed that the current procedure for BBSRC-funded students is to approve an interruption of studies during their placement.

Debby Salsbury, Academic Development Officer
Marina Beck, Head of Academic Quality and Policy
February 2015

see also Schedule of Action points on pages below
### Actions from meeting on 29 January 2015

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<th>Agenda Item</th>
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<th>Status</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>15/014</td>
<td>Student Administration Representative to liaise with SDU to provide the December count figures to include students in their writing up year.</td>
<td>Student Administration Representative</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>15/015</td>
<td>Vice-Principal (Research and Enterprise)/Dean of Science to inform the School of Biological Sciences of the decision in response to the proposal to give students award classifications, and to set a pass mark for taught courses for the MSc by Research in Biological Sciences.</td>
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<td>The Chair</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>15/017</td>
<td>Associate Dean (Doctoral School) to report on the role of research students in relation to REF at the next meeting of the Committee.</td>
<td>Associate Dean (Doctoral School)</td>
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### Actions from meeting on 16 January 2013

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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>12/47</td>
<td>Academic Registrar will report back on the discussions taking place on how reporting of upgrade outcomes to the centre can be established, to enable an accurate central record of student progress to be maintained and so that students who fail are informed of the process for appeal.</td>
<td>Academic Registrar</td>
<td>Ongoing. The Academic Registrar is working with the Academic Administration Support Manager to address this.</td>
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