University of St Andrews

POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH COMMITTEE

Wednesday 18 February 2015 at 2.30pm
in the Senate Room

Present

Professor A Dearle (Dean of Science) (Convener); Professor K De Troyer; Dr C Allison; Ms T Struetzel, Mr O Hajda; Dr M Augustine, Professor M Buehl, Dr M Costa-Gomez, Professor J Davila, Professor N Hanley, Dr I Jentzsch, Professor T Meagher, Professor T Neukirch, Dr L Reid, Dr A Reed, Dr P Reynolds, Dr K Rudy, Dr G San-Roman, Dr M Singer, Dr G Turnbull.

In attendance
Dr H McKiggan-Fee, Mrs N Milton, Dr A Sandeman.

Apologies
Professor L Milne, Professor D Woollins; Dr R Bavaj, Dr E Buckley, Dr I Duncan, Professor B Gaut, Dr N Hanley, Dr D Hanlon, Ms L Meischke, Dr P Roscoe, Mrs E Ruskuc, Dr G Slomp.

1. Provost Office Changes

The Dean of Science welcomed members to the meeting and took the opportunity to explain the rationale behind the recent changes in the Principal’s Office and the split of postgraduate research responsibilities between the Vice-Principal (Proctor) and Vice-Principal (Research). It was noted that the Vice-Principal (Research) would assume the title of Provost of St Leonard’s College.

Some concerns were expressed about the lack of clear communication about the rationale behind the changes and the impact on Schools and Units. The opportunity was taken to advise members that there would be a review of both informal and formal structures but that this would be undertaken throughout semester two and in consultation with colleagues. The intention would be to have more streamlined structures in place for the start of session 2015/16.

Some members expressed concern that postgraduate research developments had stalled since the start of semester two. It was reported that would be suite of activities being undertaken during the summer once the key priorities had been more clearly identified through discussions with colleagues. Several members expressed frustration about the lack of clear information to Schools about funding and scholarships. It was noted that this would be reported back to the Vice-Principal (Research) and Provost.

2. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting would be held on Wednesday 13 May 2015 at 2pm in the Senate Room.
Postgraduate Research Committee

Report of meeting held on Friday 10 October 2014.

In attendance:  D Woollins (VP Research);
V Brown (Provost);
C Allison; E Buckley; M Augustine; M Buehl; James Davila; A Fyfe;
E Graham; B Gaut; O Hajda; B Jacobson; I Jentzsch;
E Kefala; A Lang; T Lawson;
L Meischke (Assistant Director of Student Services); T Neukirch;
J Palmer; A Reed; P Reynolds; A Sandeman (Assistant Registrar);
T Strützel (PG Convenor); G Turnbull;

Apologies:  I Gent; H McKiggan-Fee; K Rudy; G Ruxton; G Taylor

1. Minutes of meeting held on 25 November 2013 and Matters Arising

The committee was welcomed and the previous minutes were approved.

The Provost provided feedback on the actions from the previous meeting:

**Action 1 (May 2014):** The discussions on Master’s degree titles with the Provost, Pro Dean (Postgraduate) and the Academic Registrar are on-going.

**Action2 (May 2014):** The Deans Office looked into this issue and Data Warehouse was corrected.

**Action 3 & 4 (May 2014):** The Provost has spoken to finance regarding the potential for funding stipends to commence earlier due to the need to pay for accommodation etc. The Provost informed the committee that this can occur in future. Further, the Provost notified the committee that RBS has agreed that students will not be charged full rent if they have not occupied the room. Rebates are being looked into.

2. Remit, function and membership for PGRC

The Provost updated the committee that the remit was rewritten so that the information was parallel to LTC. The Provost highlighted that PGRC provides recommendations for Academic Council to approve.

The Pro Provost (Science) requested further clarity to point No. 1, which would be achieved by the inclusion of: “To receive and review reports on PGR policy”. The VP Research recommended that the committee should include in its remit: “To consider the research element of the PGT degree and will work closely with LTC on PGT-related matters”; this was approved.

The membership will be updated with the removal of the Master.

The committee agreed that there should be clarity regarding the extent to which PGT student matters were dealt with by PGRC. While, all postgraduates are included in the community of St Leonard’s College, the Proctor’s Office and LTC are responsible for the academic programmes for PGT. The committee noted that some Schools had ‘Directors of Taught Postgraduates’ who were members of neither LTC nor PGRC.

**Action 1 (October 2014):** The Provost Office will raise this issue with the Proctor.
3. Location of Studies Policy

The Provost provided background on this agenda item. The location of studies guidelines were produced in response to a request from Schools that the University have a policy around student engagement and presence in St Andrews. Additionally, the importance of maintaining up-to-date records of students’ contact details was raised by Registry. The committee was advised that the policy applied to all students and policies required for students on T4 visas would not be relaxed for other students. We need to have an up-to-date point of contact for all students and, when they are in the UK; they need to make regular appearances in St Andrews.

A concern was raised that the policy was unnecessary from a UKVI perspective, bureaucratic and removed too much control from Schools. The Provost responded that the policy was not developed solely in order to fulfil our UKVI obligations (although it does help in this regard by ensuring that Registry are informed when a student is away from St Andrews). Rather, regardless of visa status, it is intended to be helpful to Schools by making clear our expectation that, unless their research requires them to be elsewhere, we would like students to be located within a reasonable distance.

The committee enquired about the mechanism behind the guidelines and were informed that this only applies when a student is away for more than 28 days. In general, the student should self-certificate. Absences longer than 28 days should be notified to the School’s DoPG, who should notify the Pro Provost. The Pro Provost will liaise with Registry and discuss any issues raised (for example, visa restrictions or concerns about monitoring progression) with the DoPG. The involvement of the Pro Provost and Registry will ensure that individuals are aware of any changes in regulations.

It was questioned whether the guidelines apply to part-time students. The Assistant Registrar agreed the document should be amended to explicitly include part-time students and reiterated that for (visa) compliance reasons we need to know when where any student is if they are away for more than 28 calendar (not FTE) days.

The guidelines were generally approved pending:
- Clarification on Part-time students
- Text 3.3 to be updated from “attend the university during a 9am to 5pm period” to “attend the university during core hours”.

4. Update to the Postgraduate Research Policy

The Provost notified the committee that the most significant update to the policy was clarification of the fees and in particular that fees would not be refunded in the event of an early submission of the thesis.

The committee was informed that it was not usual in the sector to stipulate a minimum fee equivalent to 36 FTE months. It was noted that students who are admitted with advanced standing are not liable for fees for that period.

A general discussion was held on extensions and leave of absences. It was reported that the Provost’s Office is considering an appropriate mechanism for when unanticipated issues arise, beyond a student’s control, some of which are often appreciated until after the fact.

Other updates were relatively minor clarifications of wording. The committee approved the updated policy pending the correction of minor typos.

6. Postgraduate Strategy

The postgraduate strategy was formally approved.

A discussion on access to facilities by PG students was an issue. In UG term time, there was pressure due to UG numbers, and outside of UG term time facilities were often not available. The Provost acknowledged that if student numbers were to grow, then facilities
would need to be expanded to accommodate increasing numbers.

7. **Annual Registry Reports**

The Provost thanked Registry for their work on the data, which was comprehensive and comprehensible. The School of History was commended for their improvement in submission times. There was concern that the average time beyond funded year was close to a year and DoPGs were encouraged to reiterate the message that completion plans should routinely assume submission would be within the fee period or very shortly thereafter.

Data for withdrawals (in particularly, % by year) was unclear but the rates were low. The Assistant Director of Student Services suggested that it would be useful to identify what were the “other” reasons for withdrawing. This was agreed, although because of low numbers involved, this would not be disaggregated by School.

**Action 2 (October 2014):** ‘Other’ reasons for withdrawal should be reported to PGRC.

8. **St Leonard’s College Activities**

The Provost described the activities that have taken place in the name of St Leonard’s College and introduced some of the future events. The Provost informed the committee that while some events were not well attend, there is a general benefit for students in knowing that these opportunities are being provided.

5. **Fieldwork Fee Application Form**

The Pro Provost (Science) introduced the agenda item and confirmed that, while the Pro Provosts approve any fee reduction, they do not approve the fieldwork. However, the application for a fee reduction should include confirmation that Risk Assessments have been approved and contact details will be updated.

The VP Research questioned the fairness of fee reductions being limited to particular students in particular circumstances and asked the Provost’s Office to review previous minutes of this committee to understand the rationale.

**Action 3 (May 2014):** The Provost Office to review previous minutes

**Next Meeting**

The next meeting will take place at **14.00 on Wednesday 18 February 2015 in the Senate Room, Parliament Hall.** (Deadline for receipt of papers is Friday 6 February 2015.)

21 October 2014