

LIVERPOOL HOPE UNIVERSITY

Research Degrees Sub-Committee: 29th January 2020

PRESENT: Professor A Nagar (in the Chair), Dr G Juhasz, Miss Z Marshall, Dr D Roche, Dr C Walsh

By invitation: Dr W Blazek, Dr B Briliute, Mr C Leyland

Apologies: **Members:** Dr O Barden, Ms K Jewell (PGR representative),
By invitation: Professor M Mac an Ghail, Dr S Marwood, Ms C Tapia

Secretariat: Mr Marc Jones

- **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

Dr Briliute drew members' attention to actum 6 (i) and requested that '90 PhD students' be corrected to 'nine PhD students'. Mr Jones undertook to make this correction. Pending this correction minutes of the meeting held on 9th October 2019 were received and **APPROVED** as a correct record.

- **Matters Arising**

- Terms of Reference (actum 1)

The Chair informed members that Research Degrees Sub-Committee will remain operational until after REF 2021 and after that as PVC for Research he will review this sub-committee and make recommendations to the Rectorate Team, citing the sub-committee's presence in the University's REF Code of Practice as well as the importance of having oversight of PGR in the University.

- Revisions to PGR Regulations, Codes of Practice and Associated Procedures (actum 4i & 4ii)

The Chair informed members that these matters would be dealt with under agenda item four.

- Process of paperwork from partner institute to panel (actum 6)

The Chair informed members that he is working with Dr Walsh, Ms Marshal, and Mr Leyland to produce the flowchart clarifying process of paperwork from partner institute to panel.

- **Update on PGR Regulations, Codes of Practice and Associated Procedures**

Members had received Dr Walsh's update to the Academic Regulations for PhD and MPhil. Dr Walsh informed members that regulations for Liverpool Hope and partner institutions have been amalgamated into a single document. Dr Walsh added that this document, and the one relating to caps on maximum durations, have both been approved by Rectorate Team. The Chair informed members that the change to caps on maximum durations will be presented to the next meeting of Research Committee. **It has been agreed at Rectorate Team that the maximum completion period for any research degree programme is the maximum duration as defined in the Code of Practice plus one further academic year.** The amendments are included in Appendix one below.

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Dr Walsh informed members that the Code of Practice has been reduced in size, with some of the material from the previous version are to be transferred to PGR handbooks. The Chair added that he had been working on updates to PGR handbooks and would circulate updated versions to members.

ACTION: Chair to circulate updated course handbooks, as above.

The Chair raised the issue of Transfer of Registration Events (TRE), suggesting that they be removed from the University's processes/code of practice and replaced by a process in which the PGR board, will make such decision. The Chair voiced this opinion that this change would dispel any notion that transferal from MPhil to PhD was an 'automatic' process. Dr Blazek sought clarification on how such a board would make decisions. The Chair responded that the supervisory team of the student in question would make a submission to the PGR board/Chair. Members concurred with this suggestion. The Chair asked Dr Walsh to draft amendments to the Academic Regulations for PhD and MPhil to reflect this change, and to prepare a paper for presentation to Rectorate Team detailing the change.

There were discussions around TRE which followed on from the previous RDSC meeting. Members raised concerns re the process and expectations around TRE and **it was agreed to discontinue the TRE process**. This means that for any new PGR student admitted for MPhil route from this point onwards, if there is a clear potential for change of registration to PhD degree then an academic case will need to be made by the Supervisory team for consideration and approval by the PGR Board/Chair of the PGR Board. Dr Walsh agreed to draft a paper clarifying this, with particular reference to cases where the potential of transfer needs to be dealt with.

Dr Blazek asked whether the removal of TRE would apply to students currently on course, The Chair replied that this would be dealt with in Dr Walsh's paper and for existing students the TRE process will need to be handled

ACTION: Dr Walsh to draft update to regulations and prepare paper, as above. CW to inform colleagues at partner institutions of this change.

Dr Walsh added that she has updated regulations for professional doctorates and undertook to circulate these to members.

ACTION: Dr Walsh to circulate updated regulations, as above.

- **Student Matters**

Dr Blazek asked for an update on the question of dedicated study space for PGR students. Mr Leyland confirmed that space has been made available. The Chair asked Mr Leyland to disseminate this information to PGR students.

ACTION: Mr Leyland to disseminate information, as above.

- **Update on the Process for Approval of Research Supervisors and Independent Chairs**

The Chair reminded members about criteria for Directors of Study and Supervisors which has been agreed/approved by the Rectorate Team, suggesting that in order to be considered for either role a candidate must have a REF GPA average of 2.5 or higher over 5-7 years, showing a sustained record of research track record. Dr Briliute pointed out that Maryvale Institute is not registered for REF and Dr Blazek added that this was also the case for Newman and St

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Mary's. The Chair informed members that this would be taken into consideration when amending the process.

ACTION: The Chair to produce a process for approval of Supervisor/DoS., as above.

- **Updates from Faculty PGR Co-ordinators, Moderators and Representatives from partner institutions**

- Research Skills Session for PGR Students and Supervisors

The Chair informed members that following the retirement of Dr Speake, he had taken over the organisation of the Research Skills training programme (for PGR student and staff). Dr Juhasz informed members that research skills seminars are scheduled to take place in LAESS and have been advertised.

Dr Blazek informed members that he ran a well-attended supervisor training session at Newman in October.

Dr Briliute informed members that PGR students at Maryvale are invited to participate in the academic forum three times per term, via webinar.

- Induction

Dr Juhasz informed members that a hold has been placed on new MPhil and PhD students in LAESS. Dr Roche informed members that there are currently no new MPhil or PhD students in Science. Dr Briliute informed members that admittance of new students at Maryvale Institute has been suspended following the appointment of an Acting Director and new dean. Dr Blazek informed members that one part time student will shortly be commencing studies at Newman.

- Research Environment and Activities

Dr Juhasz informed members that a rich research culture is forming in LAESS, with PhD students invited to participate in activities. Dr Briliute added that PGR students at Maryvale are encouraged to publish their work in the Maryvale book. Dr Blazek informed members that Newman holds research seminars, in which PGR students can participate, as well as a Festival of Research each summer.

The Chair asked Mr Jones to contact St Mary's University for updates under the above headings.

ACTION: Mr Jones to contact St Mary's University, as above.

- **Update on PGR Applications from Admission Sub Panel**

The Chair informed members that he had improved the online application system and dealt with all pending applications. The Chair added that alerts have now been added to the online application system; if an application is not progressing at the correct rate an alert will be sent to the head of the school in question, the relevant Dean and the Chair.

- **Data Schedule**

Ms Marshall raised the issue of staff departures potentially affecting PGR students' supervisory teams. The Chair informed members that the Vice Chancellor has asked him to identify key areas of research strength within the University in order to recruit PGR students

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only in cases where there is a critical mass of active researchers producing work of at least international recognition working in the relevant field.

The Chair informed members that the vast majority of Vice Chancellor's Scholarship students have successfully completed their studies and the remaining students are on track to complete. Out of 29 students initially admitted, studies of 7 students were terminated on grounds of lack of progress. Of the two scholarship holders in Education, one passed and one was unsuccessful. Members also discussed the importance of looking at and reflecting upon PGR data. The Chair emphasised that data could also come in the form of case studies and that these could be used during training sessions.

The Chair informed members that he has scheduled regular meetings with PGR students to monitor progress and elicit feedback.

- **Any Other Business**

Dr Blazek informed members that there were five withdrawals from Newman in 2018/19; one transferral, one transferral from EdD to PhD, two EdD withdrawals and one withdrawal for personal reasons.

The Chair informed members that with the introduction of a DMin, Spurgeon's College would be joining the University's Partner Institutions. The Chair asked for further detail on the processes used for validation of the DMin. The Chair also asked that the papers relating to this be presented to RDSC for approval.

APPENDIX ONE

Amendment to the PGR (Hope and Partner) Regulations and Code of Conduct – cap on maximum duration

Background:

It has become clear that the University needs to review maximum durations available for students to complete their postgraduate research studies.

It is our responsibility as a provider to ensure that our students are successful in their studies within an accepted time frame. Students are expected to continue to make progress throughout their studies, and monitoring is carried out to support this progression.

*Currently our PGR Regulations and Code of Practice do include suggested maximum durations in normal circumstances for our MPhil and PhD candidates. However, the Code of Practice then allows for extended durations **with no final maxima**.*

*It is therefore **recommended** that the University revise its Regulations and Code of Practice for both Hope and Partner Institutions to include 'expected durations' and 'maximum durations' as follows (some amendments to the current expected durations for MPhil students are required to facilitate this):*

Expected and Maximum Durations

PhD

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- [a] Full-time students shall normally submit their thesis after a minimum of 24 months and a maximum of **48 months** from initial registration.
- [b] Part-time students shall normally submit their thesis after a minimum of 48 months and a maximum of **84 months** from initial registration.

MPhil

- [a] Full-time students shall normally submit their thesis after a minimum of 12 months and a maximum of **24 months** from initial registration. (CURRENTLY 36 months)
- [b] Part-time students shall normally submit their thesis after a minimum of 24 months and a maximum of **36 months** from initial registration (CURRENTLY 48 months).

Overall Maximum Completion Time in exceptional circumstances

The maximum completion period is defined as the time from **initial registration to thesis submission**.

The maximum completion period for any research degree programme is the maximum duration defined above plus one further academic year.

The submission of the dissertation must be within the maximum period of study set out in the expected and maximum durations; the overall maximum completion time allows for approved extensions and interruptions during the students period of registration.

This amendment will apply to all new PGR students starting in 2020 and in the case of existing/on-course PGR students the PVC Research along with relevant DoS/Supervisor(s), will review these cases where students have been in the system for very long time and make appropriate recommendations at the PGR Progression and Awards Board.