

## Postgraduate Education Committee

### 1pm 29<sup>th</sup> June 2021 - Zoom meeting Minutes

Present: Andrew Grant, Lucy Weinert, Liz Murchison, Cinzia Cantacessi, Liza Hadley, Raymond Bujdoso, Ibrahim Ba, David Sargan, Fiona Roby

Apologies: Paul Freeman, Olivier Restif, Ernest Aguinam

- 1) Minutes (22<sup>nd</sup> March 2021) - approved
- 2) Matters arising
  - a. New committee member: Paul Freeman has agreed to replace Matthew Allen
  - b. Funding for extensions: DRS informed the committee of a further opportunity extensions for Research Council students in a third tranche of funding that is available for 4<sup>th</sup> year students who were not funded under tranche 2. Third year students may then be able to access remaining funding. Up to now there is not much University funding for extensions, although this is being looked at by the Cambridge Trusts.

For information and discussion

- 3) Co-Reps update PG group activities – Liza Hadley updated on activities:
  - Mentoring scheme going well – 5 pairs of postdoctoral mentor/ student mentees have been established and everyone that wanted to participate was able to. There has been very positive feedback, most pairs have met twice and will meet once more. Mentoring has been a mix of Q&A and help with practise presentations and applications.
  - Weekly skills meetings provided by Olivier Restif who opened up his research meetings to students who were then able to engage in scientific discussions, round table discussions, journal clubs etc. This was well received.
  - Outdoor social hoped for at end of July – possibility although rising numbers of covid infections may prevent this
  - DRS asked if all students are now able to access face-to-face meetings – many are thought to still be remote, but those present did not believe this was causing difficulties within their own groups.
  - DRS asked if anyone knew of anyone that was having real problems not being able to have physical meetings. RB commented that important opportunities are being missed e.g. students not being able to access other departments that are still closed. DRS agrees this is a problem that may need to be taken higher if difficulties persist. AJG commented that Departments are able to make their own decisions on opening/access so not sure how much pressure can be exerted by our HoD or HoS if this continues to be a problem after easing of lockdown rules.
- 4) Update on 2021/22 Postgraduate intake – expected numbers – 11 funded so far (1 of those expected to arrive in ET21)
- 5) New Postgrad Induction Day – proposed date 15<sup>th</sup> October. LH happy to take forward.  
ACTION LH/FR
- 6) Supervisor Training changes and departmental supervisor training workshop – DRS expects it will be likely that next year there will be a formal requirement for supervisor training even including refresher training of experienced supervisors. Also regular additional training in such topics as avoiding unconscious bias. DRS interested in committee's reaction to this: all agreed this is a good thing.

- 7) Changes to scoring system for Graduate funding nominations – at some point there will be changes to how graduate applicants are scored for funding. DRS concerned that automation may have some problems, so we need to be vigilant in looking out for any problems. For example, students may not be added to the system if they don't meet 2i minimum (this can be misleading due to assessment of international equivalences). In addition, the funding database has been redesigned and to be launched shortly, this will hopefully be useful to supervisors and students – ACTION FR – send out links to PGEC.
- 8) Committee turnover – new PG reps needed – Liza to seek replacements. ACTION LH
- 9) Engaging workers in the field (email from finance) – David summarised the email as setting out notifications needed if postgraduate students or supervisors need to employ workers in other countries. Relevant to this committee as fieldwork funding has previously been used for this reason.
- 10) Research afternoon – 15<sup>th</sup> July 2- 4pm - all encouraged to attend. AJG commented that as a work meeting, over 30 attending is allowed but noted that if very large numbers expected higher approval may be needed.
- 11) BBSRC CTP – DRS noted the collaborative training partnership with AstraZeneca and possibility of getting studentship from that source.
- 12) CC reported from E&D committee that following a call for equality champions from research groups, the smaller research groups are not represented. CC asked if LH could help with identifying smaller groups and individuals that might be recruited to represent those groups as a whole and be a point of contact for the E&D committee. Frequency of meetings/talks – not yet decided on.
- 13) DRS reported that there will be staff shortages of SBS Researcher Development trainers over the next year meaning that Researcher Development training in the Postgraduate School of Life Sciences going forward will be online and on demand (video and podcast), not live, except in the case of one-to-ones, and the more technical courses run by specialist academic trainers (e.g. statistics, bioinformatics etc.). DRS suggested that an alternative is to use academics (UTOs and experienced postdocs) to give our training – and asked for views as to whether we should set this up. AJG asked what is the School position, was there a conscious decision to change training to remote? DRS said that this was a central decision partly based on the pandemic, but confirmed after one trainer with responsibility primarily in Life Sciences left the University and another took maternity leave. It did not seem to be favoured at school level, but he did not know at what level in central administration it had been taken. He had raised his concerns with Dr Steve Joy (Head of Researcher Development, HR dept) but had discovered the change was very strongly favoured by him. Certainly, it would offer financial savings, although it is not known whether this influenced the decision. Equally, live online teaching is a more difficult job for the trainer than either face-to-face training or the production of a podcast or a simple video. But this year live online sessions given to the BBSRC DTP students consistently received bigger audiences than podcasts even when students were asked to review the latter as part of their training. They are also better received in student feedback. DRS has appealed directly to the proVC (education) about refilling two posts related to postgraduate training in SCM and SBS but feels we need to have alternative plans in place. ACTION: DRS to liaise with students to identify training needs.

No other open business.

Dates of next meetings

- MT2021: Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> December 2-3pm
- LT2022: Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2-3pm
- ET2022: Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> June 2-3pm

