

**Graduate School Review – College of Social Sciences  
2 May 2013, Kelvin Meeting Room  
Number 11, The Square**

**Panel Members:**

Prof Steve Beaumont	University of Glasgow	Convenor
Prof Ian Greener	University of Durham	External Panel Member
Dr Marina Moskowitz	University of Glasgow	Internal Panel Member
Dr Marie Freel	University of Glasgow	Senate Assessor
Michael Comerford	University of Glasgow	Student Panel Member
Mary Beth Kneafsey	University of Glasgow	Clerk to Panel

**Review Meeting Attendance:**

**Key Staff Meeting**

<b>Name</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Role</b>
Prof Richard Berry	Graduate School / SPS	Dean of Graduate Studies
Fiona Green	Graduate School	Graduate School Administrator
Prof Robbie Paton	Adam Smith Business School	Deputy Dean of Graduate Studies (College) / Director of Graduate Studies (School)
Dr Fiona Patrick	Education	PG Convenor / Lecturer
Dr Jon Oldfield	Social and Political Sciences	PG Convenor / Senior Lecturer
Dr Joe Byrne	Adam Smith Business School	Director of PG Research / Senior Lecturer
Prof Mark Godfrey	Law	PG Convenor / Professor
Prof Mark Furse	Law	PG Convenor / Professor

**Student Meeting**

<b>Name</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Year of Study</b>
Maryam Shafiei Deh Abad	Adam Smith Business School	1
Fida Bazai	Social and Political Sciences	Thesis Pending
Anna Beck	Education	2
James Clark	Law	2
Anthony Davis	Education	2
Samar Magdy Mohamed El-sayad	Adam Smith Business School	1
Jason Jolley	Law	1
Reinhold Kamati	Adam Smith Business School	3
Leanne Mattu	Interdisciplinary Studies	1
Stella Mouroutsou	Education	1
Laura Robertson	Social and Political Sciences	1

**Supervisor Meeting**

<b>Name</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Role</b>
Dr Mhairi Mackenzie	Social and Political Sciences / Institute of Health and Wellbeing	Senior Lecturer
Dr Jo Ferrie	Social and Political Sciences / Institute of Health and Wellbeing	Lecturer

Dr Moira Fischbacher-Smith	Adam Smith Business School	Dean of Learning and Teaching (College) / Senior Lecturer (School)
Prof Marian Jones	Adam Smith Business School	Professor
Dr Evelyn Arizpe	Education	Senior Lecturer
Prof Michele Schweisfurth	Education	Professor
Dr Dickon Copsey	Graduate School	College Employability Officer
Dr Matt Davies	Interdisciplinary Studies	Lecturer
Dr Fiona Leverick	Law	Senior Lecturer

### ***Final Review Meeting***

<b>Name</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Role</b>
Prof Richard Berry	Graduate School / SPS	Dean of Graduate Studies
Fiona Green	Graduate School	Graduate School Administrator
Prof Anne Anderson	College of Social Sciences	Head of College

### **Purpose of the Review**

All higher education institutions in the UK are individually responsible for the quality of their educational provision. However, to help ensure that quality is maintained and enhanced throughout the sector, the Scottish Funding Council, through the sector's Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), has developed and recommended a Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF) for use by all institutions. This includes:

- institutional responsibility for quality, incorporating institution-led/self-evaluation and review;
- external review by QAA in the Scottish University sector – Enhancement-led institution review (ELIR);
- student engagement in quality arrangements;
- information for stakeholders and the public on quality; and
- the promotion of enhancement, for example through thematic approaches in university strategies.

All elements of the QEF are interdependent as one process closely relates to and is referred to by other processes within the Framework.

The purpose and benefit of an internal graduate school review is threefold:

- to provide an opportunity for the University to evaluate its provision, the processes it uses to support its students and the resources available to ensure that provision is of a consistently high quality across the institution;
- to build the case for investment and institutional change to support postgraduate research; and
- to enable the University to provide evidence of the high quality of its postgraduate research provision when required.

The operation of a system of institutional self-evaluation and review demonstrates the University's commitment to quality to students, external reviewers and other relevant stakeholders.

The Graduate School Review process provides a formal opportunity for a Graduate School to reflect on and critically evaluate its PGR provision and to benefit from a constructive dialogue with senior academics from outwith the College. It is intended to be a positive and constructive activity, supporting Graduate Schools in the enhancement of their provision; it is not punitive or intended to be confrontational.

The Graduate School Review refers to the University's Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Degrees (<http://www.gla.ac.uk/services/postgraduateresearch/pgrcodeofpractice/>)

which is based on the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, and in particular Chapter B11: Research Degrees. It covers the following aspects of postgraduate research provision within each Graduate School:

- academic assessment standards for postgraduate research;
- structure to support PGR provision both academic and administrative (e.g. staff structure, procedures and policies specific to the Graduate School); and
- how the Graduate School ensures and enhances the quality of PGR provision.

### ***Aims of the Graduate School Review Process***

The aims of the review are to provide support to the Graduate School in enhancing its postgraduate research provision through:

- an evaluation of:
  - the relevance of research, for which PGR supervision is provided, to the overall aims of the Graduate School;
  - the currency and validity of the research supported in terms of developing knowledge within the discipline, the application of that knowledge in practice, advancement of high quality research, and developing well qualified and well prepared researchers;
  - the effectiveness of supervision and assessment methods in meeting the intended outcomes for the Graduate School's postgraduate research provision;
  - the correlation of provision with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and the requirements of external regulators and funders;
  - the effectiveness of the measures in place to assure the quality of provision and maintain standards; and
  - recent and proposed enhancements to the quality of provision.
- a discussion with Graduate School and relevant staff, students and stakeholders on:
  - the quality of postgraduate research provision, facilities, equipment and resources;
  - the Graduate School's approach to enhancement of provision including recent developments and future plans;
  - the quality of the postgraduate researcher experience and ways in which it might be enhanced; and
  - ways of promoting postgraduate researchers' effective achievement of their research degrees.

### **Introduction to the Review**

It was agreed to review the Graduate School in the College of Social Sciences (CoSS) as part of the cycle of reviews as none of its constituent parts had previously been part of a review since the cycle began in 2009. Further, the College receives a significant part of its funding for PGR students through the two year old ESRC-funded Scottish Graduate School of Social Science Doctoral Training Centre (DTC) and it was felt that an exploration of how this mechanism was working within the Graduate School would be useful at this juncture.

In reviewing the submission made by the Graduate School, it was felt that they:

- provided excellent support for students and encouragement to participate at all levels;
- provided a comprehensive and useful induction programme with continued adjustment to meet student needs;
- had instituted successful innovations such as their new PG student board and the Employability and International Student Learning Officer posts;
- have invested clear effort in researcher training programme and in developing supervisor training workshops.

It was noted, however, by both the Panel and Graduate School, that the researcher development programme was reliant on a small number of staff members and that this brought about issues of sustainability and flexibility.

The Panel felt that in some cases there was a lack of evidence to substantiate assertions, such as evaluation evidence for researcher development courses, and that the case for additional resources would have been stronger if supported by data. It was also felt that additional critical reflection might have been useful - for example, more clearly identifying the areas for development rather than a broad case that a lack of resources was at the heart of their issues. The Committee also felt that there an issue to explore with the Graduate School were the efforts they had made to foster their research culture and foster interdisciplinarity.

Broadly, the Panel wanted to cover the following during the Review:

- How broad is the buy-in to the aims of the Graduate school among staff in CoSS in general?
- What efforts have they made to address their physical space constraints - for example, consideration of alternative solutions or time frames (not for 4 years), audits of how/how much the spaces are used?
- If the primary induction period is in October, how does experience of students starting in January measure up?
- How does the PG student board fit within SRC structures or is this board a parallel development?
- How active are the student representatives on the various boards and committees? Is there training or support provided for them?
- How is the supervisor training requirement enforced? How often are training courses run to give staff adequate time to attend these?
- There are relatively low PRES scores for whether the institution values and responds to feedback from research students – how has the Graduate School tried to address this issue?
- Are there explanations for slight incongruities in PRES results:
  - Feedback about facilities and resources is relatively positive while graduate school is reporting this as an issue;
  - Results have shown little change and in some areas gone down as well as being below the Russell Group average for questions about ability to develop research and transferable skills and this is somewhat at odds with the apparent success of the researcher training programme.
- There are low PRES scores in the area around teaching opportunities – is this a lack of opportunities overall? What role does the graduate school have in sourcing opportunities, supporting GTAs, etc.?

### **Areas of Strength**

The Panel was impressed with the Graduate School's robust processes and procedures and with the clear progress that they had made in coming together as a Graduate School over the past two years. The current Graduate School is made up from the former Faculty of Law, Business and Social Science, in itself quite diverse (and in itself only a few years old as Law and Financial Studies had previously been separate from Social Sciences), the Faculty of Education and the activity at the Dumfries campus which is now the School of Interdisciplinary Studies. While there are still issues to be addressed here, the Graduate School is in the process of carving itself out a clear role. Students also continue to be impressed by the Graduate School, noting generally that it is Glasgow's reputation that brought them here and that they have a good experience during their studies.

One of the areas of both strength and of positive on-going development is the research training provision on offer to MRes, MSc and PhD students. There is an extensive and

comprehensive programme of core training on offer for students. PGR students may take only certain aspects of this training programme as appropriate for their needs. The Graduate School acknowledges that building more flexibility into the programme and enabling students to take smaller parts of the programme on demand would improve the programme further. The programme is reliant on a small number of staff for intensive delivery (noted as a weakness they would like to address) but also managed to draw on staff from across the College to bring interdisciplinary perspectives to the offering. Further, the Graduate School is working closely with the DTC to develop advanced training and provides significant support for the annual DTC Summer School which focuses on advanced training.

The induction programme was highlighted by the Graduate School as something they have worked hard to create and to develop. It is an important part of the annual cycle of activity and is compulsory for students. It is also an opportunity for students to be introduced to research ethics and research integrity – more of which is contained in aspects of the core training programme. Students who started later in the year did note the lack of this formal comprehensive induction period and the Graduate School is working on making sure that they are also provided with the start that they need even if a full scale second induction period is not possible.

Supervisors also have a role in supporting students to develop their personal training plans and in promoting good practice. Supervisor training is now compulsory in the College as of 2012/13. The training that took place during 12/13 could only reach a limited number of staff but received positive reviews from supervisors who attended the Panel session.

The Graduate School reported that it is currently conducting a number of internal review processes – such as working parties on research training and better integration of the large number of PGT programmes and the development of a diversification strategy to lessen the reliance on the Business School and their large numbers of PGT students. They were unable to provide any outcomes at this juncture but the Panel agreed that these were positive steps.

The Graduate Schools addresses the ‘impact’ agenda through supporting students to take on both internal University and external internships as well as through the core training programme. Further, the College has instituted a Knowledge Exchange / Public Policy Office in the School of Social and Political Sciences which it expects will take a leading role in supporting the impact agenda in the College.

There are a couple of innovations instituted by the Graduate School which have shown promise. One is the formation of a PG Student Board to try and make sure there was an appropriate forum for students to express any concerns and that any issues could be recorded and addressed formally. They have also created two student support posts which have been very useful for students, namely the College International Student Learning Officer and the College Employability Officer. These roles work across the College and across the student lifecycle (undergraduate through to research students) but provide essential support for student learning and for researcher development and employability.

The College also is developing ambitious plans for internationalisation and student mobility, including negotiations for a Joint Graduate School with Nankai University.

### **Areas for Development**

One overall impression that the Panel took from the series of meetings with staff and students was that while the Graduate School has made very good progress in setting up systems and processes, these developments were ‘top down’. There is still more work to be done to create buy-in from the Schools and staff and students don’t always know what the Graduate School could offer to them. Further the Graduate School had no articulated

strategy for its development that it could share to enhance planning and try to attract 'buy-in' and the Panel agreed that this could be an important step for them going forward.

There was quite a lot of discussion about the types of research training on offer and the Graduate School acknowledged that this was something they were working to improve, but also felt this to be one of their overall strengths. There were wide-ranging discussions at the different sessions about where training should take place - school v. college - with supervisors and students having some mixed feelings about this as they perceived value in both. Students however wanted training that was most clearly relevant to them and supervisors noted that they had concerns about too much separation of the training from the supervisor. The external panel member in particular highlighted concerns about the amount of advanced training being offered and noted the importance of this to the ESRC and that this was something likely to come in future evaluations of the DTC. The Graduate School reported a reliance on the DTC Summer School, in which it was heavily involved, to deliver a significant portion of the advanced training to their students.

The panel noted that as supervisors have a lot of responsibility for managing aspects of the PGR experience, having their buy in is a key to succeeding in many areas. In particular, there was discussion around the paperwork required by the Graduate School to record monthly supervisor meetings. Despite the value in having such comprehensive records, and the external drivers for doing so such as the Tier 4 visa reporting, the process of producing agreed and signed off monthly reports on supervisory meetings seems to be potentially cumbersome. The Panel felt, and staff echoed this, that the process wasn't strictly adhered to in practice and seemed to create more work. It was not that the meetings weren't taking place, but rather that the paperwork process was not adhered to. The Graduate School explained that as this was a new process it had yet to be audited and that changes would likely result from a future audit. The Panel agreed that simplifying the reporting and recording of these meetings might lead to a more successful implementation of this process.

Student representation was a further area of significant discussion. While the institution of the PG Student Board was perceived as an innovation, there were concerns that this created a parallel structure with the Student Representative Council (SRC) and could cause confusion for students. It wasn't clear how this board articulated with current SRC structures. The Graduate School was however very supportive of the contribution that student members made to its Committees.

Students who attended the Panel session reported a lack of clarity on the role of the Graduate School and how the Graduate School could help them directly. The issue of which organisational unit students identify themselves with – e.g. research group, subject, school, graduate school, DTC or Research Pool, etc. – is an ongoing, and campus wide, issue. The amount of communication, email in particular, they receive from these can also be confusing and overwhelming.

Students broadly, while reporting overall satisfaction with the Graduate School as they see it, do often remain unaware of a number of the opportunities available to them from the Graduate School. They noted occasions, for example, where they couldn't get funding (e.g. small amounts for research support) from their School or where there was a lack of parity in funding available from different research groups but where they would have been likely to have gotten funding from the Graduate School had they known it was possible. Indeed, the Dean of Graduate Studies noted that sometimes it seemed difficult to give away the funding that they had set aside for student-led initiatives.

Further communication issues exist with staff who receive a range of communications from their own subjects and schools as well as from the Graduate School, College, University services and the University itself and messages can easily become lost.

One weakness that was discussed by the Panel was a lack of feedback evidence and heavy reliance on PRES as a method of collecting feedback. The Panel would have liked to have seen, for example, some collated feedback from the researcher development programme or other training courses, first destination data, submission rates, but none of this was provided. The Graduate School agreed that there was a weakness here and that some of this data was available, sometimes anecdotally, from the Schools but that there has been no way to comprehensively collect and analyse data like this at the Graduate School level up to this point.

Students noted, particularly international students that while they appreciated that training that was available, they felt that sometimes the tone of the employability training was more geared towards working for someone or just getting a job and less about the leadership positions that many of them would be in when they returned to their home countries. Their suggestion was that more courses be offered around leadership, consultancy and policy work. Some courses do exist in these areas so perhaps this reflects a lack of awareness by some students of what is available to them. Some courses are also in high demand so it may be difficult to secure a place. Students also noted some difficulty engaging with the Researcher Development Framework (RDF) insofar as being able to identify and record during progress review which courses fit into different RDF domains. Further, several students mentioned that while they had been able to access training to be Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs), there were no (or few) opportunities to act as GTAs and that this potentially limited them in the future, especially international students with a view to an academic career.

The Panel asked the students in the student session about their views on the progress review process. Broadly this was felt to be positive and ran smoothly. However, several students who had not started in October felt that the timing was inappropriate for them. They were asked to participate in the process, as all students must, during the annual cycle which takes place in spring / early summer. They felt that the timing was too close to the start of the work and that this put them off kilter for the remainder of their period at Glasgow. The Graduate School, and the supervisory staff interviewed, felt that they did indeed take this into account and that students who started later in the year benefitted from interim reviews to make sure that they were on track with their work.

### **Recommendations and Conclusions**

The recommendations of the Panel can be summarised as follows:

1. The Graduate School would benefit from fleshing out a strategic vision, one that is drilled down to Schools and can be bought into by colleagues.
2. The Graduate School should look for ways to take the lead in generating a sense of belonging for staff and students without interfering in existing relationships.
3. The Graduate School should actively monitor potential opportunities and threats within the sector, such as competition from other DTCs, changing student numbers, resourcing issues, the tensions of layered partnerships across DTCs and similar mechanisms, and the size of Scottish DTC and its changing structures.
4. There are physical constraints on the growth of the Graduate School in terms of dedicated workspace for students and the Graduate School should continue to make efforts to address this through internal space auditing and, where possible, through other more creative means.
5. The Graduate School described constraints in staff resourcing for their core training programme. While it seems that this situation is beginning to be addressed with additional staff appointments and reallocations, the College is asked to make note of the importance of the core training programme and continue to provide adequate resource for this.
6. While the Graduate School clearly has a strong core skills programme and offers masters classes and advanced training for students in partnership with the Scottish

Graduate School and DTC, they should still continue to review their provision in the light of ESRC expectations to ensure that they meet the required standards.

7. The Graduate School should review their communications tactics and develop more effective communication loops in order to get relevant messages out to students and to staff and to be clear about the role and value of the Graduate School.
8. The Panel felt that there was a lack of evaluation evidence presented by the Graduate School and that they should look at how they might collect more feedback from students and collate and analyse this feedback to support their improvement processes.
9. The Graduate School should review / audit their processes for recording monthly supervisors meeting records processes at the earliest opportunity. Staff were broadly positive about the principle but not about the process as it was paper-based and seemed overly bureaucratic to them.

### ***External to the Graduate School***

1. The Panel noted with concern the resourcing issues highlighted by the Graduate School throughout the sessions. It is clear that there are physical constraints on the growth of the Graduate School and that this something to that the Panel would suggest is considered at senior levels of the University in strategic planning terms.
2. Students highlighted a difficulty in finding part time employment, even within the University, and felt that they were perceived as over-qualified for most of the jobs they could apply for. The PGR Service should consult with other University Services, such as the Careers Service, to explore whether or how more opportunities for PGR students could be made available.
3. The PGR Service should look at the completion rate surveys with a view to understanding whether there was any link between the start date of a student (October vs. January start) and their ability to complete on time. Students starting in January anecdotally reported that they were 'out of sync' with annual processes and didn't experience the same level of induction.
4. The Recruitment and International Office should review the cost estimates that are published as part of recruitment materials so that they more accurately reflect the cost of living in Glasgow.
5. All Graduate Schools should look at how they provide information to students about the costs that might be incurred during their research, such as fieldwork costs, and whether this could be better communicated to students.

### ***Conclusions***

This is a strong Graduate School with robust processes and procedures, a number of assets to draw on and significant potential for growth. It is clear from discussion with Graduate School staff that they are in a period of consolidation after a first stage of changes post-restructure and have undertaken a number of internal review processes to look closely at their structures and course offerings. This internal drive for continued enhancement promises to bring the Graduate School yet further forward. The Panel also noted the diverse range of subject areas that come under the umbrella of the GS and that there are no issues with the currency or validity of the research being conducted. Indeed the GS has developed a thriving relationship with the DTC and continues to attract the highest calibre of students. The Panel congratulates the Graduate School for the achievements they have made to date and their already apparent successes in bringing together a coherent and vibrant Graduate School.