Graduate School Review – College of Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences
20 May 2015, Kelvin Meeting Room
Number 11, The Square

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.

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 (GSR) process provides a formal opportunity for a Graduate School (GS) 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 the GS in the enhancement of their provision; it is not punitive or intended to be confrontational.

The GSR self-assessment 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 GS:

- 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 GS); and
- how the GS 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 GS 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 GS;
  - 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 GS' 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 GS and relevant staff, students and stakeholders on:
  - the quality of postgraduate research provision, facilities, equipment and resources;
  - the GS' 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

A Review Panel met on 20 May 2015 with staff, listed in the tables below, from the Graduate School in the College of Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences (MVLS) to discuss the written submission (Self Evaluation Questionnaire [SEQ]) the GS made to the Review Panel.

Meetings were held separately with senior staff and Postgraduate Convenors, students and supervisory staff culminating in a wrap up meeting with senior staff. The Panel comprised of one internal member, one external member, one Senate Assessor, one student member, a senior member of staff as Convenor and a Clerk from the Research Strategy and Innovation Office.

Panel Members:

Professor John Chapman	University of Glasgow	Convenor
Professor Patricia Kuwabara	University of Bristol	External Panel Member
Professor Susan Waldron	University of Glasgow	Internal Panel Member
Professor Paul Younger	University of Glasgow	Senate Assessor
Ruth Brown	University of Glasgow	Student Panel Member
Mary Beth Kneafsey	University of Glasgow	Clerk to Panel

Review Meeting Attendance:

Key Staff Meeting

Name	Institute/School	Role
Professor Jeremy Mottram	Institute of Infection, Immunity and Inflammation	Dean of Graduate Studies
Professor Matthew Walters	Institute of Cardiovascular and Medical Sciences	Deputy Dean of Graduate Studies
Professor Gwyn Gould	Institute of Molecular, Cell and Systems Biology	Associate Dean Postgraduate Research
Dr. Deborah Dewar	Institute of Neuroscience and Psychology	PG Convenor
Professor Eleanor Davies	Institute of Cardiovascular and Medical Sciences	PG Convenor
Dr. Craig Melville	Institute of Health and Wellbeing	PG Convenor/Equality Champion
Dr. Helen Wheadon	Institute of Cancer Sciences	PG Convenor
Mrs. Caroline Mallon	College of MVLS	Head of Academic and Student Admin
Ms. Lesley Dinning	Graduate School	Graduate School Administrator
Dr. Alastair Gracie	School of Medicine	Chair Training and Awards Committee
Professor Kate O'Donnell	Institute of Health and Wellbeing	Chair Higher Degrees Committee

Student Meeting

Name	Institute/School	Year of Study
Lorna Jackson	Institute of Cancer Sciences	PhD
Susana Palma-Duran*	School of Medicine	PhD
Anas Almukhtar*	School of Medicine	PhD
Natalie Hutchinson	School of Veterinary Medicine	PhD
Ross Gurden	Institute of Molecular, Cell and Systems Biology	PhD
Sara Hosseinzadeh	Institute of Infection, Immunity and Inflammation	PhD
Amelia Mordas	Institute of Molecular, Cell and Systems Biology	PhD
Mariana Arroja	Institute of Neuroscience and Psychology	PhD
Stephanie Boyle	Institute of Neuroscience and Psychology	PhD
Uduak Ntuk*	Institute of Health and Wellbeing	PhD
Michelle Hilton-Boon	Institute of Health and Wellbeing	PhD
Sonia Mitchell	Institute for Biodiversity, Animal Health and Comparative Medicine	PhD
Gillian Horne	Institute of Cancer Sciences	PhD

International Students

Supervisor Meeting

Name	Institute/School
Professor Rory O'Connor	Institute of Health and Wellbeing
Dr. Lindsay Govan	Institute of Health and Wellbeing
Professor Neil Metcalfe	Institute for Biodiversity, Animal Health and Comparative Medicine
Dr. Richard Reeve	Institute for Biodiversity, Animal Health and Comparative Medicine
Dr. Kostas Gerasimidis	School of Medicine
Dr. Emilie Combet Aspray	School of Medicine
Professor Gordon Ramage	School of Medicine (Dental)
Dr. Christopher Nile	School of Medicine (Dental)
Professor Richard Cogdell	Institute of Molecular, Cell and Systems Biology

Professor Marshall Stark	Institute of Molecular, Cell and Systems Biology
Dr. Catherine Berry	Institute of Molecular, Cell and Systems Biology
Professor Mhairi Macrae	Institute of Neuroscience and Psychology
Dr. Joanne Edwards	Institute of Cancer Sciences
Dr. Heather Jorgensen	Institute of Cancer Sciences
Dr. Lesley-Anne Turner	Institute of Neuroscience and Psychology
Professor Lubna Nasir	School of Veterinary Medicine
Dr. John F Marshall	School of Veterinary Medicine
Dr. Laura Denby	Institute of Cardiovascular and Medical Sciences
Dr. Sam Wilson	Institute of Infection, Immunity and Inflammation

Final Review Meeting

Name		Role
Professor Jeremy Mottram	Graduate School	Dean of Graduate Studies
Mrs. Caroline Mallon	College of MVLS	Head of Academic and Student Administration
Professor Richard Cogdell	College of MVLS	Deputy Head of College

Background

The College of Medical Veterinary and Life Sciences was created in 2010 in the restructure of the University bringing together 3 pre-existing GS' into a single GS as well as creating a structure of 3 Schools and 7 Research Institutes (RIs). Two of the RIs cut across College lines and are shared with either the College of Science and Engineering (Neuroscience and Psychology) or the College of Social Sciences (Health and Wellbeing). The following tables illustrate the structure of the GS staff, the size of the student population, the PhD completion rates, supervisory load of staff and the 2013 PRES results.

Graduate School Staff and Postgraduate Convenors

Graduate School Staff	
Role:	**Name:**
Dean of Graduate Studies	Professor Jeremy Mottram
Deputy Dean	Professor Matthew Walters
Associate Dean (Postgraduate Research)	Professor Gwyn Gould
Associate Dean (Postgraduate Taught)	Professor Christine Edwards
Associate Dean (Digital Education)	Dr Jo-Anne Murray
Administrative Staff	
Head of Academic and Student Administration	Caroline Mallon
Graduate School Administrator	Lesley Dinning
Graduate School Administrator	Gail Honeyman
College Administrator, Internationalisation	Linda Colvin
Graduate School Administrative Assistant	Audrey Hillis
Graduate School Administrative Assistant	Rachael Murray
Graduate School Administrative Assistant (Conversion)	Clare Martin
Graduate School Office Manager	Catherine Turnbull
Marketing Manager (Recruitment & Conversion)	Phillip Stanley
Business Development Manager (L&T)	Karen McCluskey
Graduate School Data Manager	Morven Barlass
PiPs Manager	Hazel Cadenhead
DTP Administrator	Alexis Merry
PGT Cluster Manager	Fran McCulloch
Postgraduate Convenors	
Schools:	
Life Sciences	Professor William Cushley
Medicine	Dr Alastair Gracie
Veterinary Medicine	Professor Sandy Love
Institutes:	
Biodiversity, Animal Health and Comparative Medicine	Dr David Bailey
Cancer Sciences	Dr Helen Wheadon
Cardiovascular and Medical Sciences	Professor Eleanor Davies
Health and Wellbeing	Dr Craig Melville
Infection, Immunity and Inflammation	Professor Sue Barnett
Molecular Cell and Systems Biology	Dr Stephen Yarwood
Neuroscience and Psychology	Dr Debbie Dewar

College FTE Student Numbers

PGR				
	Home/EU	**Home/EU KPI**	**Intl**	**Intl KPI**
2011	402	457	164	179
2012	421	416	123	160
2013	434	488	141	142
2014	423	526	157	160
PGT				
	Home/EU	**Home/EU KPI**	**Intl**	**Intl KPI**
2011	284	339	124	226
2012	271	333	124	189
2013	328	348	188	226
2014	317	383	193	230

MVLS PhD Completion Rates as at April 2014

	(a) Research Councils UK		(b) Total (including Research Councils)	
Starting Academic Year	Number Registered	% submitted within 4 years	Number Registered	% submitted within 4 years
2007/2008	26	84.6%	116	73.3%
2008/2009	31	93.1%	140	78.6%
2009/2010	27*	74.1%	128*	75.0%
*This group does not include students whose 4-year completion date falls after April 2014.				

MVLS Primary Supervisor Loads

Institute / School	Number of Principal Supervisors	Principal Supervisor Load (FTE)	Average Number of Students Supervised
Institute of Health and Wellbeing	32	38.5	1.2
Institute of BAH and CM	31	40.77	1.3
Institute of Cancer Sciences	30	53.55	1.8
Institute of Cardio and Med Sc	32	45.92	1.4
Institute of Infect Immun Infl	54	103.86	1.9
Institute of Mol Cell & Sys Bio	18	43.58	2.4
Institute of Neuro and Psych	19	33.64	1.8
School of Life Sciences	7	9.6	1.4
School of Medicine	49	60.04	1.2
School of Veterinary Medicine	28	44.2	1.6
Total	300		

PRES 2013 Results – MVLS, the Russell Group and Comparison with 2012 Results

	MVLS 2013	MVLS 2012		UofG 2013	UofG 2012	Russell Group 2013
My supervisors have the skills and subject knowledge to support my research	93.1	92.4		90.9	89.4	90.3
I have regular contact with my supervisor, appropriate to my needs (previously 'availability of supervisor')	87.3	85		86.6	80.6	86.1
My supervisors provide me with feedback that helps me direct my research activities	88.4	86.4		86.1	81.1	85.5
My supervisor helps me identify my training and development needs (NEW)	77.3			72.4		71.6
I have a suitable working space	85.8	85.4		79.9	77.7	78.2
I have access to specialist resources necessary for my research (NEW)	87.5			82.3		78.9
My department provides a good seminar programme	78.4	70.8		75.6	65.7	75.5
I have opportunities to become involved in the wider research community, beyond my department *(previously 'my department provides opportunities for me to become involved in the broader research culture')**	59.0	67.4		59.2	61.3	59.5
I received an appropriate induction to my research degree programme (Previously 'satisfaction with induction procedures')	71.3	51.8		66.7	43.2	73.9
I understand the requirements and deadlines for the formal monitoring of my progress (NEW)	83.9			79.1		84.5
My institution values and responds to feedback from research degree students	61.2	59.0		56.6	62.1	58.9
I understand my responsibilities as a research degree student	89.9	85.0		87.7	81.1	88.2
I am aware of my supervisor's (*previously institution's*) responsibilities towards me as a research degree student	90.1	70.8		86.7	60.7	86
I know who to approach, or where to find this out, if I am concerned *(previously dissatisfied)* with any element of my research degree programme	79.8	67.1		75.2	62.1	77
My skills in applying appropriate research methodologies, tools and techniques have developed during my programme (NEW)	93.3			89.8		89.8
My skills in critically analysing and evaluating findings and results have developed during my programme (NEW)	91.2			88.3		88.3
My confidence to be creative or innovative has developed during my programme (NEW)	82.5			79.0		78.4
My understanding of 'research integrity' has developed during my programme (NEW)	85.2			81.5		83.2
My ability to manage projects has improved during my programme (NEW)	87.4			81.4		79.9
My ability to communicate information effectively to diverse audiences has developed during my programme (NEW)	82.0			77.2		78.3
I have developed contacts or professional networks during my programme (NEW)	69.1			67.2		68.8

	MVLS 2013	MVLS 2012		UofG 2013	UofG 2012	Russell Group 2013
I have increasingly managed my own professional development during my programme (NEW)	82.2			80.0		79.5
(Only asked of respondents who teach) To what extent do you agree that you have been given appropriate support and guidance for your teaching?	57.1	38.9		53.8	39.6	57
There is adequate provision made for PG social space	52.7	43.5		53.0	33.4	
Overall I am satisfied with the experience of my research programme *(previously asked whether expectations were met and using a different scale)**	86.8	88.7		83.9	86.9	82.4
I am confident that I will complete my research degree programme more or less within my institution's *(previously 'the planned')* timescale	85.3	82.7		82.2	76.4	80.6

 * Note that Russell group results have also fallen, compared with 2011 results. This is due to the change in wording of the question and the fact that two points from a five point scale are now being used as a measure of satisfaction, where previously this was three points out of five.

Graduate Studies Strategy

The SEQ described the GS as being 'responsible for the strategic management of all postgraduate taught and research matters within the College and a wide range of administrative, quality assurance and governance issues pertaining to both postgraduate taught and postgraduate research students.' As part of their ongoing internal development and in anticipation of making this review submission, the GS developed strategy documents for both PGT and PGR.

Their strategic vision for the Graduate School is articulated as follows:
'The Graduate School oversees all postgraduate taught (PGT) and postgraduate research students (PGR) in the College of Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences. The Graduate School aims to provide an internationally recognised centre for excellence in graduate education and training, innovation, leadership, impact generation and knowledge exchange. It will continue to contribute to the development of the College of Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences as a centre for excellence in postgraduate research and teaching, and to the maintenance of the University of Glasgow as a leading research–intensive university.

The Graduate School will provide an internationally competitive portfolio of quality PGT and PhD programmes to meet market needs and produce high caliber Masters and doctoral graduates who are welcome into a range of careers and professions including those in academia, health, veterinary and social care sectors; as well as for basic and applied science and also non-science careers by virtue of an outstanding level of personal development opportunities.'

Further, the GS articulates a series of broad actions that they will pursue to achieve this vision:
- *Deliver the highest possible standard of postgraduate research and education.*
- *Recruit high quality students*
- *Develop unique and distinctive academic PGT and PGR programmes in order to grow PGT and PGR numbers*
- *Engage with funding agencies to develop new strategic directions and methods for postgraduate education.*
- *Provide excellent academic and administrative support during the PGT and PGR life-cycles.*
- *Ensure compliance with the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education and the QAA Masters and Doctoral Degree Characteristics.'*

These actions are further expanded upon within the strategy document.

Structure of the Review

The Panel met prior to the Review meeting to discuss their impressions from the SEQ. A number of themes were agreed for discussion. In the various sessions, similar questions and topics were discussed with each group to get a range of perspectives.

From reading the SEQ, in particular the Panel wish to commend:
- the progress made towards the functionality and integration of the GS despite the challenges of its size and complexity;

- the well-developed PGT strategy and strategic approach to the redevelopment of the PGT offering;
- the Researcher Training Programme (RTP) which is presented very professionally and has good course feedback;
- the availability of student led activities;
- attention to and support for PGT to PGR conversion activities;
- support for building industry partnerships which is a clear sign of recognition of the changing face of funding;
- excellent completion rates, steadily increasing and very good PRES results;
- the leadership that the GS has demonstrated in developing new processes and approaches, such as online progress review, the development of the RTP programme brochure and credit system and their focused approach to supporting students to complete on time.

Similarly, the Panel also noted the following challenges:
- improving student recruitment, including international recruitment;
- effective cohort development and the link to developing Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs) and other cohort based funding structures;
- effective community building across the Schools and RIs;
- developing effective strategies, shaping their interactions with funders and managing the loss of some important funding streams;
- the size and diversity of the College;
- queries about the structure of student representation and in attracting student representatives.

Summary of Discussions
Strategy
Within their submission, the GS presented relatively new PGR and PGT strategy documents. The GS team felt that the development process of the strategy itself was a positive experience but acknowledged that there are ongoing challenges that still need to be met and that change takes time.

The development of a new integrated PhD model was highlighted which would create a 4 year PhD programme with embedded Master's level training at appropriate points across the earlier part of the programme rather than a 1+3 model where the Master's level study is completed in the first year prior to beginning the PhD work. This approach is supported by funders (e.g. EPSRC) and formed part of the bid for an MRC doctoral training partnership led by Edinburgh in which the GS is participating. This development forms part of the College and GS thinking around improved cohort development for PGRs, identified as an area needing improvement and one on which funders are keen to see innovative thinking.

The GS also described a new tactic, for implementation in 2015/16, whereby the GS will use their internal University scholarship funding to mimic the structure of the cohort model supported by BBSRC. The idea is to replicate this internally in order to demonstrate that they can achieve what the Research Councils are looking for.

The panel queried the extent to which there is currently an international recruitment strategy for PGR students or if this is an area of focus for the GS. The response was that currently the college international leads are focusing on PGT rather than PGR. This is in part a response to another earlier internal review process in which the PGT element was specifically considered and which led to a re-structure and refinement of the current PGT offering.

Staff were cognizant that good partnership and relationship building was crucial for their international profile and well as international recruitment. There was a general sense that they should be able to tap into the international travel already undertaken by staff to support an increased number of partnerships supporting joint PhDs as well as supporting student recruitment. However, it was acknowledged that this was perhaps easier said than done.

Funding Issues
The GS has faced some disappointments with regard to winning and retaining doctoral training funding, particularly the BBSRC and Wellcome Trust funding. The Panel was keen to query whether they are actively shaping their interactions with funders, especially RCUK, and how they are positioning themselves to reverse these losses. The GS acknowledged the issues raised in funder feedback and have tried to interact with funders to get better intelligence to inform their bid writing. However, they provided examples of where they have acted on specific feedback and this still has not resulted in a successful bid.

They were keen to point out that there are external issues at play as well, such as overall reduction in the amount of funding available, the increased competition this creates and the tendency towards a consolidation of funding in a smaller number of institutions or partnerships. There are also internal factors to consider, such as strategic decisions on how to position themselves and which bids or subject areas should be put forward when a limited number of submissions are allowed. These decisions can be risky and require strategic thinking as well as political savvy internally to manage staff expectations. They take the point from the Panel that building better relationships with funders is key to being able to get intelligence that will allow them to target their funding bids most effectively. Staff noted that studentship funding seemed to be a particular issue as they felt that they were successful at winning research funding but less so with studentship funding.

Another issue raised by staff in the discussion was support for interdisciplinarity and the extent to which it was challenging to create cross cutting funding structures and research areas. The size of the college can make it challenging to create links across units, let alone across College lines. However, finding better ways to make these links across the College might support better bid development as well as other synergies to improve student support, e.g. the development of the new hospital site and a closer relationship with the NHS could perhaps be leveraged to improve the student experience.

Colleagues also were keen to acknowledge the challenges inherent in the development of these cohort-based doctoral training structures. They were aware of the possibility of a two tier system evolving and highlighted their commitment to resisting this and to providing an excellent experience for every student.

PGT Provision

The Panel queried what seemed like a large range of PGT programmes that had been developed, noting that they seemed to be expanding this provision when many other institutions are scaling back. The GS explained that the PGT programmes provided Masters level training for which there was a market, brought in income in the form of international students, supported 1+3 training structures and created a pipeline of students moving from PGT to PGR. The GS encourages the transition from PGT to PGR via recruitment information sessions which provide detail on how to make applications for PhD places. They also encourage students to talk to staff about their research interests and to think about their PGT projects in terms of something that could be developed further. The GS is clear that it is trying to provide an experience that makes them want to stay.

Despite these well-articulated positive factors, the Panel wanted to explore whether what was currently offered was sustainable. The GS confirmed that the restructure of the suite of programmes was specifically designed to make them more efficient and cost effective and that many programmes have shared courses, which reduced the staff time required to deliver these. A PG Committee will also keep this under review to make sure that it remains sustainable. They further added that they are moving to more online provision and have appointed an Associate Dean for digital education to explore the implementation of technologies to facilitate, for example, lecture recording, distance learning elements and expanded part time possibilities. It is hoped that the expertise developed can also be applied to the PGR side in the future.

Overall staff were positive about the developments within the PGT offering and felt it had been improved. However, It was acknowledged that there are tensions between the financial benefits (more international tuition fees) and cultural benefits of increased numbers of international students (a greater diversity within the student population) and the workload issues associated with delivering large numbers of PGT programmes and the teaching and project supervision that results. The GS is trying to balance the timing of the programmes and deadlines so that they are not all taking place at the same time of year as well as pooling projects from supervisors to make them available for different programmes. Staff were keen to emphasise that it was important to be careful that they protect the high quality PGT experience and don't see these courses just in terms of the income they can generate.

Student Support and Interaction

Students stressed that that they were having a very good experience and that any negatives they experienced tended to be relatively small. Locally, students report that they are likely to find that there is a lot of face to face interaction and support in their units. They also tend to feel quite integrated into their units, feeling that they are treated almost as staff members.

Social events tend to be related to organisational units or to subject groupings. A challenge that they highlighted however is that linking the different geographical sites doesn't always work very well. Students who work at the Garscube Estate note that they wish that there were more events held out there rather than on the main campus. Students gave several examples of successful events, such as a well-attended Friday lunch event or a free taxi for students to attend a Friday social event. Resources for these sorts of activity vary across units and communication about events can be problematic. Moodle, email and Facebook

pages all present different opportunities for getting messages out to the right audience and are run locally rather at a GS level.

The Panel queried the GS' use of Moodle to provide information to students. Many students did not seem to realise that this resource existed and there was little interaction on the site. It was presented as more of an information board. Students felt that it was more likely that they would connect using local resources like an institute/school or research group Facebook page. They also pointed out that some cohorts have their own ways to connect as well, for example via their own Facebook pages.

Induction
Students were asked about induction as this is an area that the GS has put significant effort into since the GS was formed. This is an area as well where across the institution, PRES scores have tended to be low – although rising consistently. MVLS, however, scores above the institutional average in this area. A widely acknowledged challenge with induction is the sheer volume of information that is imparted in a short period of time. As noted previously, the Graduate School maintains a Moodle page that is a source of information for students. However, very few students accessed this. The GS also noted that some training will be moved online from October 2015

Student Representation
The Panel asked the students who attended about the representation structure within the GS and in their Schools and RIs. Both PGT and PGR representatives are appointed by Schools and RIs. PGT representatives attend formal meetings with PG Convenors where they can raise issues. PGR reps often attend RI management meetings and bring issues directly to PG Convenors. A College level PGR representative sits on the Graduate School Board. This PGR representative does not, however, sit on the College PGR committee. Students did reflect that the structure of student representation seems to still be evolving within the College.

The Panel also wanted to know if students knew who their representatives were and how this was communicated to them. PGT representatives will be listed on programme level Moodle sites and PGR reps will be listed on the GS website. Students will also be informed by email who their representatives are. Students as well as the GS acknowledged the challenge in recruiting student reps and getting them to engage. Institute/School level representatives seem to be easier to recruit than College level representatives.

Progress Review
The Panel was very interested in the well-developed progress review and online tracking system that had been implemented to manage this annual process. A 'traffic light' system is used to denote whether students were successfully moving onto the next year (green light), had issues to be resolved (amber light) or had potentially serious barriers to progression (red light).

The Panel had queries about students who weren't at green and what support they received / how much information was provided to them. The GS confirmed that the simple traffic light reporting doesn't give a sense of the richness of interaction and that where students have

difficulties and are in danger of not progressing, they are given ample opportunity to fix problems.

The GS explained that they are also making changes to this system for 2015/16 whereby students will each have an assessment panel which conducts a series of reviews across the year. Every 3 months there will be a monitoring point; this will include a 6-month review point and the formal annual progress review. The introduction of these assessment panels is meant to add greater consistency to the process, catch issues sooner so that improved support can be provided, improve record keeping, and provide greater feedback for students. An additional change to the review process is the introduction of a formal Training Needs Analysis which the student should complete with their supervisor and which is updated along with the record of the students' training.

Students noted some awkwardness about progress review processes and that more explicit detail would be useful. They added that perhaps a specific induction to the progress processes would be useful as would some additional written guidance. They would also like to get more feedback about progress but this will likely be addressed with the new process.

Cohort Building
An issue to which the Panel returned on several occasions was that of creating cohesive and supportive cohorts of students. This is especially important in the context of improving the winning of funding for doctorial training as funding bodies are strongly supportive of such a model. A particular challenge for MVLS is the multiple locations across which their staff and students are based. Students tend to be loyal to their unit and this is where they are likely to focus their sense of belonging. The Panel noted that in the SEQ the GS described the ways in which they support student-led activities and queried whether increasing / enhancing this would allow students to build more of a sense of belonging and whether the GS could provide additional tools to do this. The GS confirmed that there are student led activities encouraged by Training and Awards Committee to which students can apply for funding, the Young Investigator Network (one RI only) and the cross-college nature of two of the RIs.
The GS confirmed that no single activity brings everyone together as the College is too large and too spread out but that activities like induction programmes or industry days come close to achieving this end.

Students felt that what was missing was better integration between the Schools and RIs and that this could improve collaboration and networking. However, some also feel that they are so focused on their work that this would be a distraction rather than beneficial. The GS could play a role in fostering connections and organising social events. Their role could also extend to targeted broader areas such as careers event and impact events where students lack information and where supervisors may be more reluctant to engage.

The Panel was curious to know if the GS felt that it was creating a 'community of scholars' or whether in the students' view that this was their role. Students attend and appreciate seminars locally but there isn't much notification about what is going on in other areas. Some note as well that having more seminars that were targeted to a wider audience and that were less specialist would encourage students to attend events outside their own research groups, Schools or RIs.

Training Matters

Personal and professional development training is provided via the GS (including promotion of training that is centrally organised) as well as via Schools and Institutes. Training more closely related to students' research was provided locally by Schools and RIs. An annual training guide is produced by the GS which collates the available training and cross references it against the Researcher Development Framework to assist students in identifying suitable courses. Courses offered within the University are booked through MyCampus and are assigned credits by the GS. Students are required to collect a certain number of credits each year.

There are mixed views on the credit system from both students and staff. Students report that they sometimes struggle to get onto relevant courses and take any available course to make up their credits. How credits are allocated seems to lack transparency from the student perspective as some things seem like they should attract more credit than they do - especially activities deemed 'external' which are not always external to the university but rather external to the GS. Students also add that some courses are at too basic a level and that some are difficult to get onto. They also report that they found it difficult to get information about the broad range of training available across the University, e.g. relevant training that may exist within other Colleges but which might be open to them. Varying responses were received to questions about accessing PGT courses, the variability depending on where the course was offered as well as different levels of familiarity with them on the parts of students and supervisors. It would be really useful from the student perspective if more information were included in the training handbook.

Staff echoed many of the students' comments that the GS could also be more flexible in giving credits for a range of activities and that some courses are too basic. They also feel that students can seem unhelpfully obsessed with getting credits.

Staff interviewed by the Panel added that not all students will pursue academic careers and that researcher development activities can be very important for future employability. The GS could perhaps provide more guidance or advice in this area or support a greater range of events to allow students to explore possibilities. The GS does, however, work closely with the Careers Services who participate in induction events and run events targeted at students which are publicised by the GS. Further support for enhancing employability comes in the form of internships or placements. BBSRC funded students are required to undertake a "professional internship for PhD students" (PIPS) during their PhD. Those that have undertaken a placement or internships have found them valuable.

Staff were also questioned about supervisor training. All were aware that this was required every 5 years but felt that the content was a bit formulaic. However, the GS reported that these sessions are evaluated and improved each year according to feedback provided by attendees and so continue to evolve. Recent developments include greater emphasis on peer training, emphasis on supporting students to submit on time, and more training in research integrity. Staff suggested that this training was an opportunity to inform staff about the value of and the support provided by the GS.

A query was also raised about support for English language courses and whether students' language skills impact on completion. Staff are aware that there are courses available but also wonder if the currently required IELTS score is sufficient as students' language skills sometimes seem quite poor. Language issues are also raised at progress review but not always followed up. Some supervisors note that they give out small pieces of work at the beginning of the programme to try and get a feel for students' abilities and that they have a role in supporting or finding support for them.

Sense of Belonging to the Graduate School

Staff were asked if they were able to appreciate the value of the GS. They perceive the GS as a bureaucracy / administrative entity and are unsure about the value for students of 'belonging' to the GS. Staff offered contrasting views reporting both that the GS can be very helpful with resolving issues but that it can also add complexity and make it more challenging to resolve issues. Staff are also not always clear who is who and what roles individuals play, reporting that there is a separation of support functions between GS and Schools and RIs and it's not always clear who is doing or should be doing what. This might be something to rethink and clarify.

Students noted that they tend to think of the GS as an administrative office and as a central point of contact for training courses. They would be more inclined to seek out information locally than from the GS as a first port of call. Loyalty is first to unit or research group, then to RI, then to MVLS. They did note that it would be useful in their view to have more integration with the wider university but not clear what this would entail. International students may be in a better position as regards the broader university as they benefit from the international student support service which runs a variety of engagement activities. Others provided a contrasting view that the information is out there and you need to actively engage to find it.

The Panel explored with the groups what they thought the GS could or should usefully do? Staff would like better support in the Schools, not just in the RIs where greater numbers of PGRs are concentrated, more support for students with external issues, like NHS policies and ethics applications, and more help and support with advertising studentships beyond just putting it on the website. They felt that the GS could perhaps support the creation of self-selecting or emergent cohorts especially interdisciplinary groups or students who are otherwise a bit isolated, for example clinical groups or dental students. Geography is a big issue for the college and staff agreed that some strategic input into how to bring disparate groups together might be helpful. Students funded by the Doctoral Training Partnership get extra support and something that the GS could do would be to help level the playing field for students who are not part of a DTP.

Areas of Strength

The Panel agreed that the GS displayed the following areas of strength:
- When asked to relay positives about their experience, all students agreed that supervision is very good and much appreciated. They further agreed that this is central to what is a very positive PGR experience.
- The GS has taken a strategic and coherent approach to updating the PGT offering. While this will require ongoing monitoring to assess success, there are a number of potential knock-on benefits to the PGR community from these developments:

students may find their PGT experience opens a route into a PhD, they may benefit from being able to take some of the PGT courses and they may benefit from the creation of more digital teaching resources.

- The GS clearly takes undertakes and reviews evaluation of its efforts and continues to make changes to improve the student experience as evidenced by the improving PRES scores around induction and the changes for 15/16 to the progress review process.
- Overall, PRES scores and completion rates are very good, indicating a well-functioning operation and high quality environment for students.
- Despite some of the challenges articulated, the GS has created robust systems and processes in a large, diverse and geographically distributed college. There was clearly a lot of rich and interesting activity that wasn't fully captured due to length restrictions of the report and which was only partly revealed in the discussions.

Areas for Development

The Panel noted the following areas for development:

- There was a lack of clarity around the role of the GS and many staff and students perceived it as a bureaucratic and primarily administrative structure. Key roles for the GS could be in the development and sharing of good practice and the promotion of consistency in the PGR experience.
- PG Convenors could do more to facilitate information flow from GS to RIs and create a better two-way conduit for information. Enhancing and clarifying their role could potentially be highly beneficial to communications within the College.
- The GS needs to further develop their strategy for how they are going to move forward with student recruitment, how they are positioning themselves to attract funding, building relationships with funding bodies and the development of partnerships. The loss of funding in some areas is a disappointing setback and a real challenge for the GS to overcome.
- While acknowledging the size and diversity of the college, communications were an issue that arose in a number of areas. Finding ways to improve this would reap benefits for both staff and students.

Recommendations and Conclusions

The specific recommendations of the Panel can be split into two categories: primarily strategic in nature and primarily operational. They are summarised as follows:

Strategic:

- PG Convenors should be encouraged to feel that they have a strategic role, one aspect of which is to sell the benefits of the GS. Further, their role should be clearly articulated so that they are able to act as effective agents for the GS within their Schools and RIs.
- The GS should develop processes to support the production of funding bids for student places and seek ways in which they can be more proactive about encouraging the emergence of new bids. The GS should take the lead in developing tactics for improved positioning with the research councils, charities and other major funders.

- The GS should continually review its student recruitment strategy and, if it was falling behind recruitment targets, take the lead in exploring new avenues to pursue.
- Overall, the GS should not hesitate to identify where greater support from the College or the institution would be beneficial. Some of the recommendations above may be equally applicable to other GS and the MVLS GS is encouraged to pursue what it identifies as generic issues with other College GS' to mutual benefit.

Operational:
- There is a lot of good practice locally within RIs and Schools, but finding ways to nurture this and share it more effectively would be highly beneficial and create more consistency in the PGR experience of MVLS students.
- The GS should consider ways to support more community building or leadership in promoting scholarly pursuits at the level of the GS in order to combat the perception that it was primarily a bureaucratic structure.
- More signposting and improved information on the website would be beneficial. The GS Moodle has the potential to be more useful but was significantly under-used by students. Consideration should be given to deploying a staff member to focus on Moodle or to develop an alternative as a repository of information that would be highly beneficial to students.
- Several issues arose with regard to the RTP. More information about the availability of PGT courses to PGR students was needed, including a standard process for enrolling on these. Greater flexibility in the accumulation of credits for external training courses or activities should be considered. Staff stressed the importance of the RTP for developing employability and in this context increased provision of careers advice and training around impact would be useful.
- The structure within the GS is complex and neither students nor staff fully understand it. It would be worth exploring if the structure could be simplified to the benefit of all.

Conclusion

The over-riding message is that one to one supervision is excellent and students are having a positive experience overall. Clearly there are challenges, such as the scope and size of the GS and the geographical distribution of staff and students, but the GS has made great strides in building an effective operation. The Panel welcomed the development of new PGT and PGR strategies and encouraged the GS to continue to look forward and evaluate its progress.

The Panel also acknowledged that a number of the challenges that were raised for exploration and/or which came up in subsequent discussion with the various groups were those that were also raised by the GS in their submission, signaling that their reflective processes were effective.

The GS should be proud of its achievements and the Panel would like to thank them for their participation in the Review process.