

<b>Graduate School Review</b> <b>College of Arts, 4 June 2019</b>
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**Introduction to the Review**

A Review Panel was convened on 4 June 2019 with staff and students from the College of Arts to discuss the submission the Graduate School (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 one internal member, one external member, one Senate Assessor, one student member, the Vice Principal (Research) as Chair and the PGR Strategy Manager as Clerk. This Review was the first pilot of a revised Review process where the GS submitted a much shorter narrative accompanied by a detailed data pack to support the narrative.

**Panel**

Professor Miles Padgett	VP (Research), Chair
Professor Jennifer Burns	University of Warwick, External Panel Member
Dr Bethan Wood	School of Interdisciplinary Studies, Senate Assessor
Professor Mhairi Mackenzie	School of Social and Political Sciences, Internal Member
Mr Flynn Gewirtz-O-Reilly	School of Mathematics & Statistics, Student Member
Ms Mary Beth Kneafsey	Research & Innovation Services, Clerk

**College Meeting**

Professor Nick Fells	College of Arts, Dean of Graduate Studies
Dr Louise Harris	School of Culture and Creative Arts, Graduate Studies Graduate Studies Convenor
Dr Pauline Mackay	School of Critical Studies, Graduate Studies Convenor
Dr Henriette Partzsch	School of Modern Languages and Cultures, Graduate Studies Convenor
Dr Bryony Randall	College of Arts, Deputy Dean of Graduate Studies
Ms Lesley Watson	College of Arts, Graduate School Administrator

**Student Meeting**

Myra Booth-Cockcroft	School of Humanities, 3 <sup>rd</sup> year, FT
Finn Daniels-Yeomans	School of Culture and Creative Arts, 3 <sup>rd</sup> year, FT
Juliette Irretier	School of Culture and Creative Arts, 1 <sup>st</sup> year, FT
Kevin Leomo	School of Culture and Creative Arts, 2 <sup>nd</sup> year, FT
Britnee Leysen	School of Humanities, 2 <sup>nd</sup> year, FT
Dana Little	School or Critical Studies, 3 <sup>rd</sup> year, FT, DFA
Laurie Manson	School of Humanities, 1 <sup>st</sup> year, FT
Carolyn McNamara	School of Humanities, Thesis Pending
Kari Sund	School or Critical Studies, 2 <sup>nd</sup> year, PT
Rachel Thain-Gray	School of Humanities, 1 <sup>st</sup> year, PT

**Staff Meeting**

Dr Tatiana Heise	School of Modern Languages and Cultures,
Dr Colin Herd	School of Critical Studies,

Dr Amy Holdsworth	School of Culture and Creative Arts,
Dr Pauline Mackay	School of Critical Studies,
Dr Neil McDonnell	School of Humanities, LKAS Fellow
Dr Geraldine Parsons	School of Humanities, PG Convenor
Dr Bryony Randall	College of Arts, Deputy Dean of Graduate Studies
Ms Claire Smith	College of Arts, PGR Administrator
Professor Catherine Steel	College of Arts, Dean of Research
Professor Debra Strickland	School of Culture and Creative Arts, PG Convenor
Dr Ben White	School of Humanities, PG Convenor
Dr John Williamson	School of Culture and Creative Arts, LKAS Fellow

### ***Senior Staff Meeting***

Professor Roibeard Ó Maolalaigh	College of Arts, Head of College
Professor Nick Fells	College of Arts, Dean of Graduate Studies
Miss Liz Broe	College of Arts, Director of Professional Services
Ms Lesley Watson	College of Arts, Graduate School Administrator

### **College Introduction**

The Dean of Graduate Studies was asked by the Panel what the GS was most proud of and they highlighted the following:

- the enhancements the GS has made to student support and wellbeing;
- supporting staff and student success in attracting funding, especially through the Scottish GS for the Arts and Humanities (SGSAH);
- the lead role they have taken in the development of SGSAH consortium and the training opportunities it provides to students;
- connecting with external bodies, especially through the SGSAH, and building relationships with organisations such as the Hunterian Museum and National Library of Scotland;
- the international composition of their student population.

Similarly, the Dean was asked what he thought required the most improvement, with the following reply:

- providing more support to international students to welcome them and acclimatise them to PhD study at Glasgow;
- building more links and partnerships, especially internationally, and framing Glasgow both as a centre of excellence and someplace that is welcoming and supportive of their students;
- resolving existing PGT/PGR resourcing tensions, possibly by shifting some PGT responsibility to Learning and Teaching functions;
- staff resource in the GS to support the growth and improvement activities identified.

### **Key Topics**

#### ***Submission and Completion***

It was noted from the data that on-time student submission rates for AHRC-funded students is around 95% but much lower for self-funded students. The GS highlighted the diversity of the student population, especially the number of part time, self-funded

and older students. The GS feels that there might be some issues with student support during the end of the period of study and that there is still a culture in some areas and/or with some supervisors that time to submission is not an issue. Completion rates (final award, as opposed to 4-year submission rates) are not as high as submission rates. There may be several reasons for this, including external examiners causing delays during the post-examination period. The GS feels that they have made some strides towards addressing this that perhaps are not yet visible in the data, but which should become evident. However, having identified this as an issue, it is something that can be further explored. They also note that there are competing drivers in that there is a push towards recruiting greater numbers of students, but which potentially means greater flexibility at the admissions stage and further stretching resources to support students.

The Panel queried what additional efforts might be made to support improved submission for self-funded students. The GS highlighted that this was not a homogenous group and that different issues were at play. International students might be self-funded but need longer due to possible language gaps. Other self-funded students may be employed full or part time and balancing study with work or have other requirements, such as family or caring responsibilities. Students may also struggle with mental health issues arising from, perhaps, stress, financial issues, isolation, career concerns and not knowing what processes are in place to support them or to take a leave of absence. The GS does have clear and robust processes, but it is challenging to ensure that all supervisors and students are aware of these – or even aware of the simple message that if you don't know the answer, ask the GS.

Supervisory staff felt the gap between funded and unfunded students also underscored the issue that funded students don't always feel they can take time off without losing funding during any suspended period and therefore would try to avoid it. Examples of community building efforts both locally and by the GS were highlighted as being very supportive for students. Conversely, however, it was noted that not everyone can easily attend on-campus events, for a variety of reasons, and that often those who would most benefit are unable to attend.

There are some issues that have been identified during the post-submission period which affect overall completion. Some international students are in a precarious position with regard to their visa status and/or financial position during this period. There is no access to any University hardship or other funding during this period and students may struggle to support themselves and have little recourse. Additional clarity around the type and duration of corrections required would be helpful to enable students to move to their final version. Examiners tend towards selecting 'minor corrections' but provide significant corrections impossible in the time limit.

### ***Annual Progress Review***

The GS as well as the supervisory staff attending felt that the culture around Annual Progress Review (APR) has changed significantly in recent years and was therefore much more effective. Staff and students are aware that it is not a formality but rather a formal monitoring process with the potential to identify issues that can be addressed. There was some discussion about the timing of APR as there are some concerns that

the first year APR, which happens only after about 6 months, is therefore too early to identify many issues but that waiting an additional year until 18 months is too late.

It was not felt that the Graduate School withdraws more students overall as a result of the improved APR process, but that the process is more successful at identifying issues, providing more robust feedback and ensuring students understand the feedback. Supervisors have also been through more training in recent years and better understand the role of APR in supporting students and avoiding situations where students get to nearly the end of their PhD without being informed of major issues. Where possible, an objective third person with subject knowledge participates in the Review and provides additional feedback.

### ***Funding***

The GS has done well with and continues to increase its share of AHRC funding from the SGSAH Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP). They acknowledge that some of the success comes from the quality of student applications and is therefore somewhat unpredictable. However, the GS has done a lot of work to supporting the development of high-quality applications and strong statements of support from supervisors. Supervisory staff felt that the support and training they received in developing SGSAH applications was instrumental in their success to date. Staff also noted that that processes around recruitment and admissions have continued to improve and their ability to send out timely offers is helpful in securing the best students as well.

While the AHRC is a significant source of funding, there are myriad small funders and it is more difficult to target and support these, including international funding streams. Many smaller funding streams have different deadlines and specific requirements as well, making the re-use of applications for multiple funders more challenging. The GS would like in particular to target international funding streams more effectively and in a more structured fashion. One issue with taking this forward is getting access to good data about where PGR funding comes from across the College. A further issue is not having sufficient staff resource to support the development of international partnerships.

### ***Study Space***

This is a significant issue for the College of Arts as well as a source of student disquiet. There are issues with study spaces in other areas in the University, but it is most acute in the College of Arts. There are around 90 assigned desk spaces across three different locations as well as some additional hot-desking space for PGRs. Some subject areas will have local spaces to allocate but the reality is that close to 75% of students in the College will not have an allocated space on campus. Students are positive about the development of the Alexander Stone Building study space and understand the constraints on the College – but nevertheless remain of the opinion that they should have much better access to workspaces. Accessibility is also a problem as not all spaces can be made accessible and this is an issue with the Alexander Stone development. There are additional issues in some disciplines where students may work mainly with printed materials which can't always easily be moved around from desk to desk.

Students feel strongly that they should have access to desk spaces on campus. They would like to have the psychological distance between work and home and the community building and support benefits of being able to work on campus and develop relationships with their colleagues more effectively. Hotdesking is controversial as some feel that it is fine but that hotdesking spaces are not often well used. It can be stressful as well if you are walking around in search of a desk at which to work every day. They feel that space could be better organized, e.g. small offices with more people assigned than desks (for example, 4 desks for 6 students) to promote full usage, or more effective space utilization across the University tapping into extra spaces in other Colleges. They did, however, highlight that lockers are much appreciated, as are kitchen facilities.

### ***Recruitment, Selection and Retention***

The GS is considering a number of ways that students can be more effectively supported and thus retained as well as generating positive word of mouth about the research environment at Glasgow. The GS would like to be seen as an international hub and to develop their ability to tell a positive story about doing a PhD at Glasgow in this context. Brexit was identified as a serious source of uncertainty and potential risk to developing international partnerships. However, the GS has recently revamped their Visiting Research Policy in an effort to make this process simpler and more cost effective for students. The hope is that this will attract more students to the community, even if for shorter periods of time, and that overall this will facilitate the creation of links and partnerships. Some thought is being given to adding taught elements for Year 1 to provide a level of academic acculturation, particularly for international students, but which would benefit home students as well as building an additional feeling of community for students.

The GS raised the mental wellbeing of students in this context as well. The Graduate School Administrator is an advisor for PGRs and students are able to raise issues with her directly. There is a feeling that University resources in this area are strained and that this remains an issue for students seeking support. The GS are currently reviewing data on reasons for suspensions and expect to see that mental health is a primary reason for this.

### ***Supervisor Training***

The SGSAH has helped raise the profile of supervisor training as it is required of supervisors every four years in addition to training provided directly by SGSAH. The GS now records training formally on the CORE (HR staff record system) record so that attendance at training can be more effectively tracked. Supervisor training is, however, reasonably well attended and receives fairly positive word of mouth which encourages staff. Staff generally feel that more discussion and case-study related training would be more beneficial than providing information via PowerPoint. The GS have made an effort to adapt their provision, are planning more sessions and have added viva training, responding to supervisor requests, and host a twice-yearly supervisor forum where supervisors can come and discuss any issues they have.

Staff agree that supervisors could be more aware of how to support students with mental health issues or how to direct them to support but conversely report that there is some unease that they might be in the 'front line' of support without being qualified for

this. There is greater awareness here but further to go and supervisors agree that overall supervisors should be more confident about directing students to other resources.

### ***Researcher Development***

The GS was asked how they link training identified at application stage, Training Needs Analysis and/or training needs identified at APR and how they close the loop to ensure identified needs are met. The GS noted that the training plan required by the SGSAH in applications is a helpful start which they can review and map onto the current programme. They highlighted an additional challenge in that there is a large amount of specialist training available to students in subject areas as well as via the SGSAH and that neither the GS nor individual supervisors are able to maintain a full picture of available training. Changes to the SGSAH in its current incarnation have also made the provision of training more proactive. SGSAH have developed 'catalysts' that will provide more structured disciplinary training. This is an ongoing and evolving piece of work and the GS will continue to work with the SGSAH to ensure appropriate training provision. Non-AHRC funded students can benefit from much of this training but this is a message that might benefit from wider dissemination amongst students.

Students explain that they rely on their supervisors for advice about training as well as the training handbook provided by the College. They note issues with getting into the right training at the right time, the popularity of certain courses, issues with enrolling on courses in MyCampus and the vagaries of waiting lists, and understanding how attendance is managed, i.e. can they just go along to a course and hope a space might be available. Students generally feel the training is high quality, although sometimes at too basic a level, but that external providers are not as well briefed about the institution as they might be. They further note that they get conflicting advice about training as they need to balance a focus on thesis submission with attending training.

### ***Careers, Internships and Placements***

The value of internships and placements for employability and promoting student satisfaction was discussed. Students are more aware than ever that they will need to find non-academic jobs. There are some placements and internships available, including through the SGSAH, but there could be more. Students, however, don't always see these as a good opportunity in the sense that they may already be working to support their study, may already have significant work experience, can't afford to take time out or are international students with visa restrictions which make internships very difficult. However, students who do undertake internships or placements report very positive experiences.

Staff have noticed more students wanting to discuss careers earlier in their PhDs but they themselves do not always feel comfortable discussing career options outside their personal experience. They note that many students come to their PhD with professional experience already and that these students might be encouraged to be a resource for other students as might alumni. They also highlight that the city of Glasgow itself is a marvellous resource and that it might be possible to make more of their own networks of contacts outside of the University in order to assist their students.

They agreed that it might be beneficial to involve students more in their own impact and knowledge exchange activities as this may benefit their future job prospects.

#### *Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs)*

It was queried whether there were sufficient opportunities for students to teach. The GS felt that this varies widely, and that demand comes locally from subject areas who provide relevant opportunities. There are bottlenecks in some areas but it's also not possible for people to teach in subjects where they lack expertise. They would like every student to have the opportunity to teach but it's not possible. The variations between Schools make it challenging to take a holistic view. However, this is perceived as an issue and the Dean of learning and Teaching as well as the Dean of Graduate Studies along with the School Heads of Professional Services have plans to look into this further and take a more coordinated approach.

Students note quite a lot of process issues with their GTA work, relating to timesheets and salary payments via university systems. They also highlight how much more work they need to do than they feel that they are paid for. Marking, preparation and administrative tasks are noted as key areas for which they feel underpaid. There are inconsistencies as well as to what students are paid for different tasks in different subjects – hourly rates are similar, but the number of hours paid for tasks can vary. This leaves them with a sense of feeling exploited. For many students, this is either a key income source or significant to their career development plans, or both, and they feel they have little choice but to accept their terms of employment. Training to support students to develop their skills as teachers is available but students are only required to take the initial statutory course. Those that feel that training was insufficient generally have not taken more than this one course. Those who have been able to engage with additional training provided by the Learning Enhancement and Academic Development Service (which is unpaid) tend to feel that the training is worthwhile, and that they have been better supported. The GS did host a GTA forum to try to understand the issues that students were experiencing as well as share practice and students found that this was a positive event. Students hope that this will be a recurring event.

#### ***GS Structure and Resourcing***

The focus of the GS is primarily PGRs, but they retain responsibilities around PGT programmes, which dilutes their resources. There are a large number of PGT programmes, and the panel felt that this was unsustainable for the GS as well as more generally for the College. While PGT matters are not a subject of this Review explicitly, there was a sense from the Panel that there should be a review of PGT provision in the College to rationalise the diverse programmes. This review should also consider how PGT is supported at College level, possibly moving more responsibility to learning and teaching teams or appointing a deputy dean to cover PGT matters.

PGT matters aside, the GS reported other resourcing issues. Administration in the GS is handled by 2.5 members of staff, one of whom was about to leave. This Review is an opportunity to highlight the benefit to the GS of additional staff resource as additional staff would contribute to support for internationalisation, collaborations, networking, funding and continuing to improve student support, especially for international students. These activities are not possible considering the administrative burden

currently placed on staff and their role in the advising of students and in dealing with complex student issues.

### **Final session with College Management**

A final summary session was held with College and GS Management. The Panel highlighted that the student session was very positive overall with less positive aspects, such as GTA issues and desk space, being those over which the College has limited control. Supervisors were very positive in particular about the training and feedback they received in developing proposals for studentships and it was likely from the success rate of applications that this made a positive impact. There is further work for the GS to do in understanding issues with submission and completions, but this work is underway in the GS and in the University more widely to better understand student data.

The GS is aware of the strengths that they have in their people and in Glasgow itself and are encouraged to capitalize on this, celebrating their community and telling stories of their successes to attract others to Glasgow and build effective careers, knowledge exchange and impact networks to benefit all.

### **Commendations and Recommendations**

#### ***Commendations***

1. It is clear from the submission as well as the Panel meetings with staff and students that the GS are well aware of existing issues and are already beginning to address these. They are commended for their reflective and positive approach to developing their provision.
2. It is also clear that the GS has taken a student-focused approach and has prioritised community building and support for students in the face of an atmosphere of somewhat limited resources for students with health issues.
3. The administrative team in the GS is effective and responsive and highly praised by staff and students who engage with them.

#### ***Recommendations***

##### *University*

1. The University should review and improve GTA pay and conditions to create a more equitable working environment for students undertaking teaching. Negative experiences with GTA work are demoralising and potentially affect wellbeing as well as completion rates.
2. The University should continue to explore ways to support and develop international partnerships that support PGR recruitment and work to reduce the administrative barriers to the development of these partnerships.
3. The University needs to continue to improve central systems that provide data about the PGR experience and improve the ways in which this data is accessed and able to be manipulated to better understand the PGR experience. This could, for example, include data about sources of funding for PGRs, breakdowns of completion rates by different groups of students, information about internships and placements how these affect submission rates.

### *College / GS*

1. The College should devise a strategy around increasing and diversifying their sources of funding for PGRs and capitalise on their established strengths in supporting the development of funding applications.
2. The College needs to undertake a student workspace audit in order to understand students' needs and think innovatively about how space is used in order to maximise the number of workspaces available.
3. The College needs to consider appointing a PGT Director or Deputy Dean for PGT matters for the College to provide focused, strategic, senior-level support for developing and improving the PGT portfolio in a way that that relieves pressure on PGR support in the GS but also facilitates conversion, where applicable, to PGR programmes.
4. The GS needs to review the PGT offering across the College and reduce the overall number of programmes where these are not sustainable. An example might be a hub and spoke model where smaller numbers of core courses support several programmes through the variety of elective courses.
5. The GS should explore a more comprehensive approach to reviewing the training needs of their students and systematically reviewing Training Needs Analysis to ensure that identified training needs are met.
6. The GS should develop more problem or case study-based training for supervisors to improve their understanding of the PGR journey and develop their skills in supporting students to manage the challenges of doctoral study.
7. The GS should continue to review its processes for Annual Progress Review to ensure that its processes are consistent, rigorous, supportive and fit for purpose.
8. The GS should seek to create a clear framework to foster connections with the cultural sector and creative industries in Glasgow and the region in order to enhance and diversify employability. Their ability to draw upon the valuable professional and creative experience of the student body in particular may enable effective peer-to-peer support and the provision of informed advice.
9. There are a number of areas that the GS has identified for development, which the Panel supported, but for which there is currently insufficient staff resource. The College has a diverse range of students with unique implications for funding, completions, employment prospects and support for student wellbeing. The ability of the GS to continue to develop their provision will hinge on having additional staff resources to support their objectives.

### **Conclusion**

The overall impression made by the GS in this Review was positive and proactive. Staff and students are positive and engaged and the GS overall has a sense of looking towards the future. It was clear from the submission that the GS had an awareness of the issues facing them and had already undertaken significant work to address these. The GS should be proud of its achievements and the Panel would like to thank them for their participation in the Review process.