QAA Scotland

Building a Research Community – Key Issues for Discussion

Focus On: **The Postgraduate Research Student Experience**

Introduction

The questions in this document were compiled based on the results of our research into the research community, comprising both an examination of policy, and extensive consultation with staff and postgraduate research (PGR) students.

The questions invite reflection, and should - in doing so - encourage further action from the reader. They are arranged according to the key points that arose from our research. Coming together to discuss the questions within institutions (policy makers, academic staff, services staff, and PGR students) should result in a sense of where the research community is now, and how it can move forward.

This document takes the view that all stakeholders - PGWT, colleagues in organisational units,[1] and institutions - are partners in this discussion and all are required to participate.

- Supervisors
- Physical space
- Building academic identity for PGR students
- Centralised communities
- Online communities
- The role of PGR student training in developing a research community
- PGR student engagement and representation.

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[1] An 'organisational unit' is the term used in this document to cover individual departments/disciplines/schools/colleges within an institution.

Supervisors

PGR Students	Colleagues in Organisational Units	Institutions
• What do you understand to be your supervisor'/s' role? • Do you talk to your supervisor about topics outside your immediate research? • Do you communicate clearly with your supervisor about topics such as conferences, publications and career development? • Do you attend talks by visiting researchers, seminars etc., which your supervisor might have recommended? Do you ask them to recommend activities such as these?	• Are expectations regarding the supervisor's role clearly articulated? • What role do supervisors play in your local research community? • Is there a means for new supervisors to be peer-mentored? • Do supervisors have the opportunity to engage with student-led activities? • How are supervisory training opportunities communicated to staff?	• Is there a baseline standard of supervision across the university? • Is there a code of practice for supervisors? • Does this code of practice clearly articulate the institution's expectations of the supervisor's role in the research community? • Is there an opportunity/requirement for continuing professional development for experienced supervisors? • Is there scope for wider discussion of issues relevant to supervisors across all organisational units?

Physical space

PGR Students	Colleagues in Organisational Units	Institutions
• What kinds of physical space would support your needs as a researcher? • Do you feel that your needs for space are met? • Do you know how to book space within your department or institution? • Does the space available to you now make you feel part of a community? • If not, is there a way in which you could address this?	• Is dedicated space for PGR students a priority? • How are offices allocated to PGR students? • Are any groups disadvantaged by this allocation system? • Do PGR students have access to kitchen facilities? • Are all PGR students housed in the same area, or are they scattered? • Is feedback on space invited from PGR students? • Could office space be allocated more effectively, e.g. shared offices allocated on basis of stage of study? • Are PGR students housed in the same location as staff? Are there opportunities for informal interaction?	• Is PGR student space a priority issue? • Are many different kinds of space available? • How much oversight is there of practice in different organisational units with regard to space allocation? • Are there connections between the main campus and outlying campuses?

Building academic identity for PGR students

PGR Students	Colleagues in Organisational Units	Institutions
• Are teaching opportunities available to you? • If so, is the advertising of these opportunities, and the selection process, transparent and fair? • Do you have opportunities to socialise within your department/subject area? • Do you see yourself as part of the research community? • If not, how might that be addressed (e.g. office space, IT privileges, building access, training opportunities)?	• Is there a standardised and transparent process for making teaching opportunities available? • Is there an opportunity for academic staff to act as mentors? • Do researchers receive any teacher training that is specific to their organisational unit?	• If a space has been created for multidisciplinary work, do PGR students identify with it? Is it fulfilling its purpose? • Are teaching opportunities recognised as a means of creating academic identity and entry into the research community? • Is transparency and fairness in the recruitment and selection of teaching staff prioritised in the code of practice? • Is there a specific code of practice for researcher teaching opportunities? • Has researcher feedback on teacher training been sought? • Are development opportunities made clearly available (e.g. HEA membership)?

Centralised communities

PGR Students	Colleagues in Organisational Units	Institutions
• What constitutes your research community? • If your research community is departmentally/subject area-based, do you feel you have the opportunity to build connections outside that (attending seminars, training etc.)? • Is it easy to find out what's on outside your subject area?	• Are there links between different organisational units? • If not, could these links be created to enable new opportunities for researchers? • Are training sessions/seminars outside the organisational unit communicated to students?	• Does the institution encourage cross-disciplinary work? • Is there visible, easily accessed support for the creation of such communities?

Online communities

PGR Students	Colleagues in Organisational Units	Institutions
• Are you aware of online opportunities to connect with other researchers? • Do you feel confident using these sites? • Do you see online communities as an alternative/extension/replacement for your existing research community? • Are there online spaces for PGR students within your institution? • If you have been on/were to do field work, is there a way of staying connected to your university?	• Does your organisational unit have someone who is responsible for online strategy? • Does your organisational unit (as a whole and/or individuals) have a presence online? • Are you aware of the research networks that already exist online? • What internal online resources are available to your researchers? • Are researchers individually mentioned on staff pages?	• Does the institution's strategy in terms of online presence include the research community? • Is training available for organisational units that are seeking to build an online presence? • Is training available for researchers who want to build an online presence?

The role of PGR student training in developing a research community

PGR Students	Colleagues in Organisational Units	Institutions
• Are you aware of all training opportunities available? • Are you encouraged to participate? • Do these opportunities meet your needs? • Do you see these sessions/events as an opportunity to network outside your immediate subject area? • Do you have the chance to make suggestions for future training?	• Are research students encouraged to participate in training sessions? • How are training requirements communicated to research students? • Is there scope to undertake training outside the immediate organisational unit?	• Does the institution regularly review training provision? • Are requirements clearly laid out in the code of practice?

PGR student engagement and representation

PGR Students	Colleagues in Organisational Units	Institutions
• Do you feel you have regular opportunities to give feedback? • Do you feel comfortable giving feedback? • Are you represented by students' associations? • Are there opportunities to become involved in students' associations? • Do you feel there is a baseline level of engagement required of you? • Do you feel under pressure to maintain this level of engagement? • Is this level of engagement beneficial to you?	• Are research students regularly asked for feedback? • Is there an opportunity to give informal, anonymous feedback? • Are research students represented on committees, steering groups, etc.? • Are expectations of research student engagement accepting of individual difference which might have an impact on engagement? For example, caring responsibilities, chronic medical conditions, mental health management, financial issues, etc.?	• Is PGR student representation embedded in the code of practice? • Do services cater to PGR student-specific needs? • Are all researchers equally represented in policy and strategy planning?