**PGR Forum Thursday 20th August 2015, 1pm, Room 4E22, Frenchay Campus**

The main points raised from the email feedback received on the paper circulated in July are below along with the Graduate School responses.

* **Commenting on a full draft thesis is very time consuming for supervisors but there is no time allocation under the category ‘without supervision’**

We are looking at whether the ‘completion fee without supervision’ can generate time allocation for supervisors to comment on a full draft. As a result we would look at re-naming as ‘completion fee’

* **Conflicting incentives on deciding which fee is appropriate.**

The proposed new system includes an independent reviewer as well as the supervisors and FRDC.

* **Why don’t students just stay on a full fee until they submit?**

We have had views from ‘full-fee’ to ‘just writing-up fee’ therefore the proposal provides these options to both PGR’s and supervisors.

**Notes taken at the PGR Forum**

Below are notes of the comments/discussion at the PGR Forum along with a summary at the end of the main points raised. The next step is to take these comments to the GSC for consideration and a final paper created.

* It was emphasised that the proposed completion fee ‘ with supervision’, is not an additional fee, it is an additional option. At the moment the only option available to students is:
  + Eligible for a writing-up fee currently £370
  + Pay full fee

Therefore the proposed ‘completion fee’ gives the PGR’s the additional option of having a reduced fee that gives them reduced supervision, and therefore should be a benefit to both PGRs and supervisors.

Would this effect a student who received a Graduate School studentship? It would, they are not automatically eligible for writing-up fee when their bursary finishes at 3 years.

* The completion fee ‘with supervision’ can be paid monthly, and is only paid until the submission of the thesis.
* We could convert the £370 into 2 workload bundles so that there are at least a couple of WLB available for reading of the final draft thesis.
* Concerns raised about setting a student up to fail if they cannot afford to pay fees, as their supervisor does not get WLB to pay for supervision. However, it was emphasised that this is the case at the moment, and the proposed completion fee will hopefully reduce this situation by having a half-way house option of a reduced fee with reduced supervision.
* Need to make it clear to prospective students and funders that they could expect to pay full fees for 4 years (7 years PT), but if the student reaches completion phase in their last year they may be eligible for the reduced completion fee.
* RCUK are now funding 3.5 years, therefore funders will be expecting an increase. This also led to some discussion about whether UWE should also increase future studentships to 3.5 years.
* There is concern that PGRs that are on Faculty funded bursaries which are only for 3 years will end up having to pay a higher fee than the writing-up fee that they expected. However, it has always been the case that these PGRs would be liable for fees after their funding has ended and that the writing-up fee does not include supervision. Therefore with the introduction of a completion fee these students will have an additional option.
* Due to funding being 3 years a lot of PGRs/supervisors are under the impression that their research should finish within 3 years.
* FRDC dates and PR deadlines may need to be re-considered as there is a big gap between PR3’s which will mainly happen around 1st October and the FRDC not sitting until mid- November, this will mean that the student would not know what fees they have to pay for approx. 6 weeks.
* It was raised that pre 15/16 starters should continue on writing-up fee. However, this would mean that they wouldn’t have the option of the reduced 40% fee, therefore this doesn’t seem fair to them. Therefore instead it was agreed that any transition arrangement would need to apply to everyone currently registered and anyone who starts before this policy has come into force and been clearly communicate to applicants and funders. The transition arrangement is primarily necessitated by the fact that some current students have an expectation that they will be able to move to the writing up fee after 3 years and still receive some supervision.
* Need to be better about communicating the assessment criteria as it was apparent that there are a lot of different views about what a PhD is.
* Should be made clear at Interviews regarding the fees, however it was pointed out that the guidance notes for Chairs of PGR interviews are told to make sure fees are discussed in each interview.
* The suggestion was raised as to whether the Progress Review stage 3 should take place at 2 years, 9 months to ensure that PGR’s completed within 3 years and therefore within their funding period so that they don’t have to pay the completion fee. However, it was felt that this would put more pressure/time constraint on the PG Researcher and their supervisor and therefore was not something that was generally supported. However, it was pointed out that a Progress Review stage 3 can take place earlier than 3 years if the PGR is ready to do it, as 3 years is a maximum deadline date for full-time students.
* Need to clarify and more explicitly manage expectations, both from the PGR side and the university as well as look in more detail at the induction processes to the graduate school.
* It is our duty to ensure that supervisors are given time to support students.
* It was suggested that we introduce the 3 month grace period for writing-up, in the past this would have been at the end of 3 years, although it was felt that this was a good idea, it would maybe not fit so well with Faculties other than HAS.
* The student rep suggested that a speedier start up would be helpful, for example signing up to modules prior to starting, getting deskspace sorted etc. so that time isn’t wasted at the start of the PhD.
* The student reps understand the burden the current arrangement puts on supervisors and are broadly supportive of the proposal as the right things to do. They also expressed some concerns about quality of supervision and ensuring that at the end of the three years a student isn't in the position of having to continue to pay full fees because they haven't received adequate supervision. Although they recognise that the progression system is theoretically designed to help with this but it may be worth looking at other measures too.

Main points raised and need to be looked at by the GSC

* Improved Communication about fee liabilities – with PGR’s, supervisor, funders
* Consider a period of phasing in the completion fee
* Consider a period of 3 months period of grace.