Postgraduate Support Workshops:
Support for Postgraduate Research Students (EUSA)

Workshop 3: Support for PGR students (EUSA) (14:30)

Supervisors: Personal Tutors: IT systems

- Supervisory relationship encompassing academic, pastoral and skills training support
- Space for peer support: isolation of PGR students with variety of needs across institution
- Financial support – finishing on time and “writing up” year – supervisory support provision – tension between three year funding and four year study period with supervision
- Student expectations: cultural differences, different international academic practice; student-supervisor 2-way statement of expectation at 1st year (MoU?)
- Supervisory training incorporating 10 week reports to aid expectation management
- Flexibility for part-time/full-time study
- Informal peer assisted learning and support – something in writing that this is provided at School-level.
- Reward/recognition for peers/postdocs/supervisors providing support
- PGR may benefit from having an electronic notes system, similar to that for UG/PT

Emerging PGR themes:

- Enhanced supervisor support – administration, academic and pastoral. Management of supervisors
- PGR community/peer support – mechanism for combating isolation
- Physical space – for peer support/PGR community – academic and social
- Systems – student need should inform technology; flexibility of systems to accommodate variety of disciplines/methods of delivery/student demographic
- Management of expectations for student/supervisor

Session Four – Supporting PGR Students (EUSA led)

- Focusing on enhancing support provisions for PGR students based on experiences.
- The group was split into two groups and asked to look at the hand-outs, which detailed categories of potential PGR problems, and then asked to comment on various different things they may have encountered or dealt with in their respective roles.
- These included Supervisory Relationship, Health and Welfare, Funding and other Support, and the ‘Writing Up Year’ and beyond.
- The group discussed differences in subject areas ‘writing up’ periods, English requirements – do we offer enough support to arriving students? The University of Edinburgh says they are ready because they offer a relatively basic English Language competencies test. What are the similarities in pastoral care we can offer PGR students that we already offer UG students?
- An unconditional offer means you cannot retrospectively place conditions on entry (ie ‘go and take an English language course’). It can only be ‘strongly recommended’.
• Would peer support for supervisors work?
• PGT and UG students have much more in common than PGR students, notes one individual.
• Realistic and Reasonable expectations are needed.
• Do PGR students enter with a preconception that they will not like their supervisor?
• The fact that the new title ‘Student Support Officer’ means students can identify someone to go to for support has reportedly cleared up many issues as to not knowing who to speak to. Could something similar be done for PGR students? Is it worth renaming some PGR orientated staff ‘PGR Support Officers’?
• It was decided that it needs to be made sure that students know they have someone to go and speak to if they have a problem, and that individuals in these roles must be good at the pastoral care side of things.
• Is one of the barriers to PGR students seeking support an issue with self-image (e.g. Because I am older I do not want to appear weak and seek advice?)