

# Graduate School Workshop December 2018

## A short report

Lindsay O'Dell, March 2019

A workshop to discuss the Graduate School took place on the 5<sup>th</sup> December 2018. Representatives from across the university including faculties, students, OUSA and RES were invited to attend. The workshop included an opportunity for attendees to provide feedback on the current arrangements and thoughts about how the Graduate School should develop over the next 3 years.

The workshop addressed a series of key questions, details of these and feedback provided by attendees are appended.

Participants noted that a clear vision and imaginative approach would enable and support the development over the Graduate School. In the workshop we discussed a community of practice approach to the graduate school which would frame and enable all who are interested in postgraduate research across the university to be part of a series of ongoing discussions- and most importantly, actions, to shape the next 3 years of the Graduate School.

In my view the key issues arising from the workshop for the Graduate School are:

### To communicate the *value* of Postgraduate research at the OU

- To showcase PG research within and outside of the university
- Drawing in alumni- and current students- to contribute
- Demonstrating the contribution of the PGR community in many aspects of university life including research, knowledge exchange/engagement and links between teaching and research

### To be a central point for contact, activity and values concerning PGR students

- A focus on social justice, wellbeing and equality
- To link to the mission for the university
- An example given at the workshop was the expansion of ARCs but there will be other partnership opportunities

### To clarify internal process

- More support for faculties with partnerships
- Better working together across faculties, GS, registry and RDC
- More effective communication with faculties and other stakeholders
- Clarification of roles
- Improve registry function and support

### Ways of feeding back and getting involved:

To send initial feedback- what are your views about the key issues identified in the workshop? What is most important? Is there anything missing? What is unique to the Open University? Please email- [lindsay.odell@open.ac.uk](mailto:lindsay.odell@open.ac.uk)

I will also have a regular drop-in in the Hub for anyone to drop in to discuss the developments with me (details to be confirmed and communicated via the GSN).

There will be a number of opportunities to participate in discussions about the Graduate School over the coming months. Details will be shared through faculty representatives on the Graduate School Board as well as on the GSN.

**Q1. Workshop feedback – what went well?**

| Identity                               | Central Point                                                                     | Training                                                      | Partnership                               | Programmes                                                   | Social Networks               |
|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Identity - beginning of external face  | Specific points of contact for specific queries e.g. paperwork, training, comms   | Introduction of training for (a) supervisors and (b) students | DTP support                               | Development and approval of Professional Doctorate Framework | Social networking             |
| Creation of identity 'graduate school' | Single points of contact makes it easier for student association to work for PGRS | Good training facilitators and opportunities                  | Central support for DTP formation/bidding |                                                              | Social space for PGR students |
|                                        | Central point of contact for information                                          | Gradually improving training relationships with faculties     | ARC conference                            |                                                              | Celebrating submissions       |
|                                        | Much needed new focal point                                                       | Introduction of chair for viva                                | Networking overseas                       |                                                              |                               |
|                                        | Good idea to merge GS and RDO                                                     |                                                               |                                           |                                                              |                               |
|                                        | Blending GS functions and RDT (personal view, not unilateral)                     |                                                               |                                           |                                                              |                               |

FASS pilot PhD teaching scheme

## Q2. Workshop feedback – Where is there room for improvement?

| Communication                                                                          | Focus                                                                                                       | Resources                                                                                          | Bureaucracy                                                                  | Partnership                                                                                                                                  | Training                                                                            | Networking & Wellbeing                                                    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Prompt, accurate and sufficient                                                        | A focus on quality over quantity - there is competition - recognised quality as more valuable than quantity | Registry reporting functions are very poor at present due to lack of DORIS/Staff                   | Recruitment processes, communication and paperwork bureaucracy - black holes | Expansion of the ARCs - recruitment of new centres particularly in developing countries without an established or limited university network | A lot of training not relevant- students in some faculties not asked what they need | Need to bring interfaculty and interschool students together better. How? |
| An alumni network celebrating the achievements of previous graduates                   | Good but not very imaginative. Develop a strategy first then a plan that maps the path to the strategy      | Takes too long between verbal offer and written offer- students being lost due to under resourcing | Exit/viva/corrections processes - opaque, confusing, ownership, time scales  |                                                                                                                                              | Ensure all viva chairs and supervisors have had training                            | Need right type of events to get students together more                   |
| Ask students what training they want                                                   | More buy in from faculties                                                                                  | Systems/DORIS & CIRCE                                                                              | Beautiful bureaucracy                                                        |                                                                                                                                              | Pathway for training needed - Needs analysis                                        | No physical hub for welfare/advice and guidance                           |
| GS not very open to finding out how it works - difficult to penetrate how to access it | Clarification of roles/relationships with RDC, GS Board, APD, faculties etc.                                | System for training records etc. (Poor DORIS)                                                      | Make bureaucracy function better and faster                                  |                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                     |                                                                           |

**Q2 cont.... Workshop feedback – Where is there room for improvement?**

| Communication                                                                                                                 | Focus                                                                                | Resources                                                                                    | Bureaucracy                                                         | Partnership | Training                                | Networking & Wellbeing |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-----------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Look at ways of communicating. Not more communication but how we communicate                                                  | GS not clear about its purpose(s) & role (or it hasn't shared this) at the top level | Resources for training (i.e. professional and admin support) - are things in the right place | Reduce friction of doing business with GS (lower transaction costs) |             | Teaching opportunities are insufficient |                        |
| More communication                                                                                                            | Clarity of roles and responsibilities with academic units                            | Data Management                                                                              |                                                                     |             |                                         |                        |
| external facing website for the Graduate School - P.O.C. for PG student queries, showcasing PGR student research, events etc. | Communication of the change and what does it offer                                   |                                                                                              |                                                                     |             |                                         |                        |
| Better centralisation of PhD opportunities. More Find a PhD events centrally                                                  |                                                                                      |                                                                                              |                                                                     |             |                                         |                        |

### Q3. Workshop feedback – What are the barriers?

| Resources                                                           | Communication                                                                                                                      | Training                                 | Bureaucracy                                               | Change                                                            | Partnerships                                                                                                                                                           | Other                                     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| Need more central facilities (resources) for student led activities | Not good integration with faculties and GS                                                                                         | Training not relevant                    | Bureaucracy repetition of knowledge/information on forms  | Constant structural change                                        | I am not sure I understand the barriers to creating cotutelle arrangements, but there are certainly barriers, despite the huge support and REF benefits for cotutelles | Barriers attracting students living in MK |
| Needs more resources (GS very under resourced)                      | Lack of clarity about roles e.g. research degrees FASS                                                                             | Calendar of training is hard to navigate | Complex governance structure                              | Split between RDO and Graduate School                             |                                                                                                                                                                        |                                           |
| Staff time GS + school level                                        | Communication of the change and what it means - student                                                                            |                                          | Delays in approving things to do with the student journey | Start up phase - disjointed vision; emerging structures; learning |                                                                                                                                                                        |                                           |
| Barriers is <u>loaded</u> frame                                     | There needs to be some care in the communication to ensure it is clear, not repetitive and sufficiently detailed but not overly so |                                          | Communication black holes in registry                     |                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                        |                                           |

**Q3 cont... Workshop feedback – What are the barriers?**

| Resources                                             | Communication                                                                   | Training | Bureaucracy                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Change | Partnerships | Other |
|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|--------------|-------|
| Resourcing (limited) choice of (1) people (2) systems | The rhetoric that omits all the central contributors (APD, Faculties, RDC etc.) |          | Timescale turnaround<br>RDO acceptance of research students                                                                                                                                                                                 |        |              |       |
| Reduced staffing levels in RDO/T                      |                                                                                 |          | Viva panels: RDO/GS rejecting a panel membership should be a once in a decade event, In Physical sciences we have problems with almost every panel. This is a level of administrative oversight that simply <u>does not need to exist</u> . |        |              |       |

**Q4. Please comment on initial thoughts for the Graduate School**

| Focus                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Communication                                                                                                                                                          | Resources                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Clear vision and 3 or 5 year plan with milestones                                                                                                                                                                  | Articulate the value of PGRs to OU leadership                                                                                                                          | Don't centralise PhD students in a single workspace - allow some degree of self - ??? In where they work - better workspace standards for students in an open plan office they can see that workspaces on campus are not used often |
| GS as facilitation                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Importance of communicating with the different stakeholders and getting buy in                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| GS as advocate                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Less GS as managers                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Collaborative working involving <u>positive</u> contributions from <u>all</u> the faculties would be fab.                                                                                                          | I'm unclear on the governance structure and responsibility for policy and strategy. What are the distinct roles of GS, GSB & RDC. Need clarity over terms of reference |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Good idea to build collective working. Need to understand how to do this - there are lost of ways of defining cohorts it is about doing it in a way that PGRS belong in faculty, school, OU as well as PGRS cohort |                                                                                                                                                                        | All PhD student workspaces by law need to be accessible - comply with Part M of Building regulations                                                                                                                                |
| Providing strong representation for faculties                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                        | First priority is fix registry system (this may be Bureaucracy)                                                                                                                                                                     |
| How to attract students to MK? To come onto campus, to live in MK?                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

**Q5. What is missing?**

| Focus                                                                                                                                                          | Communication                                                                                       | Wellbeing                                                                             | Partnership                                                                  | Training                                                                                                                                                 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Interaction between faculties and GS can be strengthened                                                                                                       | Clarity of roles and responsibilities (GS and others)                                               | An integrated approach to mental health and wellbeing at faculty and university level | More support for faculties to develop partnerships and gain external funding | DTP training - what is the OU USP what can the OU offer that other Uni's can't? e.g. media training, engaged research, development of distance learning. |
| Try lots of things and not be afraid to get things wrong - Try something (e.g. shut up and write groups then coffee and circulate - repeat with something else | Style of communication - caring tone of voice rather than formal emails                             | More cake                                                                             | Cotutelles                                                                   | Teaching opportunities for PG students                                                                                                                   |
| Sorting registry and reporting functions needs to be a top priority                                                                                            | Linked up pathway for student journey all the way from application-acceptance-researching-finishing |                                                                                       |                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                          |
| External visibility as research institution                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                     |                                                                                       |                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                          |
| Determination of the role of the Graduate School - leadership? PGR voice? Administrative functions                                                             |                                                                                                     |                                                                                       |                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                          |

**Q6. How could this community work from your perspective?**

| Community of practice                                                       | Focus                                                                                              | Communication                                                           | Bureaucracy                                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| At best - informing leadership; PGR voice, problem solver for common issues | Less internal management - more external facing development                                        | Clearer lines of communication                                          | Fewer forms, shorter forms, less repetition |
| At worst - talk shop                                                        | GS focus on what works better collectively                                                         | Better communication of School/Faculty initiatives                      |                                             |
|                                                                             | Raise profile of research and research students                                                    | Remind the OU that PGR students are part of the community not an add on |                                             |
|                                                                             | Awareness raising by GS on how PGR students can help bridge the gap between teaching and research. | Regular informal meetings between GSD and PGR directors                 |                                             |

**Q7. Are there other things that the Graduate School should be undertaking?**

|                                                                             |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Recognition for things that already exist and work in schools and faculties |
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