A meeting of the Postgraduate Affairs Sub-Committee was held on Wednesday 24th October 2012 in River Room 2, Tower Building at 10.00 am.

Present: Mr WI Ball (Convener), Professor R Abboud, Ms R Doherty (DUSA), Dr K Edwards, Mr G Hutton, Dr L McLellan, Mr J Norris, Dr D Potter, Mrs G Sharpe, Professor M Stark, Professor C Wilkinson.

Apologies: Professor D Bearn, Mrs J Paul.

In Attendance: Dr M Glover.

1. Minutes. PAPER A

Noted: the minutes of the meeting of the former Postgraduate Affairs Sub-Committee of 27th February 2012.

2. Matters Arising

Minute 7(ii) Remit of the Sub-Committee PAPER B

The Sub-committee discussed the proposed remit and membership of the Sub-Committee and welcomed the renewed emphasis on enhancement and sustainability in taught postgraduate provision.

The sub-committee also noted that its main tasks would also include the oversight of relevant regulations and policy development, reworking the current Code of Practice and supporting business planning activities.

Resolved: to approve the remit and membership outlined in Paper B.

3. Overview Report from Admissions and Student Recruitment PAPER C

The Sub-committee considered baseline admissions and matriculation data supplied by Student Operations.

It was reported that as at 2012 there were approx. 1100 matriculated FT TPG students. 608 were on international full fees and 490 were on home fees. The total number of TPG students was more difficult to ascertain as distance learning and part-time student statistics were not held centrally.

It was noted that the drop in number of applicants in 2012-13 could be understood in the context of a number of factors acting to suppress both supply and demand in taught postgraduate provision at the University. Global and local recession, voluntary severance, Scottish Government withdrawal of scholarships in favour of tuition fee loans, UKBA-related reputation problems, reductions in governmental support and a move to local content in key markets have acted in concert to decrease
numbers of applicants in all parts of the University. It was noted that TPG numbers were down across the whole of the UK.

Diversity in the postgraduate population is important for the student experience – provision needs to cater for the needs of home and overseas students.

It was argued that given long-term geopolitical problems in key markets it would be necessary to invest and diversify in the face of competition from other English speaking countries and from other UK universities. The need for diversity in the postgraduate population was highlighted as important for the student experience – provision needs to cater for the needs of home and overseas students.

The Sub-committee noted small increases in actual numbers of TPG students – but some areas had missed targets and hoped to lessen the impact of this through the January intake.

Some members of the sub-committee argued that taught provision was seen as less important and was not subject to the same levels of investment, compared to research activity in the run up to REF in 2013.

Related to this point was the fact that the University had an annual budget of just £150k for recruitment – significantly less than many of our immediate competitors who have better infrastructure and investment.

The sub-committee agreed that smart thinking is needed about how the University can grow and sustain its provision in a hostile economic environment- taking into account funding, bundles, discounts, commissions, smart pricing and marketing of quality academic programmes.

It was noted that part of the problem was converting applications into matriculations and that a development of a value-added student experience would help this – work experience, internships and placements for example were strong selling points.

**Resolved:** to request an update on applications, offers and matriculations following the January 2013 intake. These figures should also attempt to capture the distance learning, part-time and off campus TPG student numbers.

To request the annual budget for recruitment to be placed on the agenda of the Senate L&T Committee and the Senior Management Team.

4. **Taught Postgraduate Quality Assurance Issues**

The Sub-committee received notification of the planned dates for the QAA Enhancement-led Institutional Review in 2013.

The Director of Quality Assurance informed the Sub-committee that the review would take place on 16-17th October 2012 with the follow-up visit during the week beginning 18th November. It was noted that this timetable would mean that the Reflective Analysis needed to be completed by May 2013 for internal approval at Senate and Court. In addition the University would need to provide an advance
information set to the QAA. The structure of this would become clear in due course but it is expected to provide the context and framework for the review visits and will focus on the student learning experience, enhancing learning and teaching, academic standards and assurance of collaborative activity.

It was noted that the approach taken at the last review would be used again – so that a series of forum/workshops would be held to feed into the working group producing the reflective analysis.

The Sub-committee was asked to note that taught postgraduate programmes and collaborations were likely to be the focus of reflection and members would be asked to attend and assist where appropriate. Members were asked to look at the ELIR webpages for further information. [http://www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/Pages/ELIR.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/Pages/ELIR.aspx)

Noted: that a summary paper on the timetable for ELIR 2013 would follow.

5. Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey 2012 PAPER D1 and D2

The sub-committee considered the results from the last PTES survey held in 2011. It was noted that the results indicated that the University scored at or above the national mean score on each area of questioning.

The sub-committee discussed the benefits of continued participation in the survey and it was noted that the timing of the survey (before most students had started their dissertation) and participation rates (at around 20%) were significant drawbacks.

However, given the developing plans for merging the survey into the NSS and the relatively minimal costs involved the sub-committee recommended participation with the recommendation that the results are fed directly into enhancement activities.

Resolved: to recommend participation in PTES 2013.

6. TPG Policy and Regulations PAPER E

The sub-committee discussed the current regulatory framework and noted the generic Code of Practice as providing a central set of guidelines in an otherwise decentralised system that relies primarily on programme level regulation.

It was argued that despite being difficult to find and overdue for an update, the Code had proved useful when setting up new programmes and was worth keeping - although it was acknowledged that students would invariably depend on the programme handbook rather than the very general information contained in the Code.

Resolved: to retain the Code of Practice but to plan for a full review and update.

7. Any other Business.

SFC Outcome Agreement: TPG additional funding call open.

The Convener outlined the current SFC call for bids to provide additional TPG places
on courses that were closely aligned to the Scottish Government policy priorities in return for funded places and tuition fee waivers. It was noted that this would need prompt action, as the deadline was 8th November 2012.

Sub-committee work plan for 2012-13.

The Convener explained the intended working methods of the sub-committee given the pressing nature of some of the tasks identified and the fact that the next meeting would not be until February 2013. The committee identified several areas which would benefit from sub-group activity. These included:

- Updating code of practice, policy and regulations on TPG provision
- Developing a strategy and template for business planning for sustainable TPG provision
- Identifying areas of enhancement of the TPG student experience including increasing the emphasis on employability through internships and work placements
- Developing SCQF level 11 benchmarks and ensuring M level-ness across all programmes within the University
- Exploring further opportunities for great articulation with undergraduate provision and research programmes
- Developing a greater understanding and awareness of competitor pricing and marketing strategies including fee waivers, scholarships etc
- Increasing the investment in TPG infrastructure with specific emphasis on the development of a comprehensive dedicated TPG website presence

It was agreed that the Sub-committee would in the first instance, form into 2 or 3 working groups to take forward some of the above discrete areas of activity and report back to the Sub-committee at the next meeting. It was also agreed that additional staff could be co-opted to the working groups as appropriate. The membership and role of each group would be circulated as soon as possible.

8. Date of next meetings.

10.00 am on 25th February 2013 in River Room 3
10.00 am on 1st May 2013 in River Room 2

W. I Ball
Convener