Postgraduate Research (PGR) Community

1) Outline the project or initiative and what makes it innovative and inspiring (max 300 words).

UHI has a diverse student population, and one that's geographically disparate. The PGR student body is small and spread across the various colleges throughout the UHI network, as well as including distance-learning students throughout the world.

Anecdotally, possibly due to the nature of their studies and personal circumstances, PGR students do not engage with student initiatives and representation as much as other Higher Education students. This does not mean, however, that opportunities to participate as a community should not be available to all, as and when students wish to seek advice from fellow students or to further engage.

The Highlands and Islands are an inspiring and unique place to study, but with comparatively so few PGR students across the network there are few colleges which can boast having an established PGR Community. The PGR Community project has sought to collate comments from across the UHI network to establish a list of priorities for the development of a community that fits the social ad support needs of PGR students.

For the last two years, the Graduate School had been in a state of flux regarding management and staffing. Though staff have worked hard to maintain a level of service for students, certain developments have been put on hold due to resource restrictions. The project has worked with the Graduate School to discuss initiatives and has taken responsibility for various student-led developments.

The PGR Community project includes distance-learning students as well as those based within the Highlands and Islands. By utilising social media to its full potential, as well as making use of existing technologies offered by UHI (such as drafting a student's guide to getting involved at UHI, as part of Silke Reeploeg's *Student Representation Project* funded Blackboard project), UHI's PGR Community is available and accessible to all PGR students.

2) Detail how the project or initiative was delivered, from the planning stage through to its successful conclusion (max 300 words). Include details of timing* and funding.

Following on from earlier discussions amongst members of the PGR student community, the concluding session of the UHI Postgraduate Research Conference in November 2013 focussed upon gathering student thoughts and opinions on how best to develop a PGR Community at UHI. This became the starting point for student-led work developing and enhancing a PGR Community.

A number of PGR students have been involved in discussions relating to establishing priorities for the PGR Community and identifying issues to be resolved. These discussions were led by Euan Bowditch, as one of the three PGR students who, along with Sarah Bowyer and Jenni Connelly, led on the running of the UHI PGR Conference 2013.

Throughout 2014, meetings were held with relevant members of Graduate School staff in order to present and discuss research student priorities. Work has been undertaken to establish how best to work with UHI staff to achieve the project outcomes, and how to formalise these through existing committee structures.

The UHI Research Degrees Committee (RDC (formally Research Degrees Sub-Committee)) was kept informed of developments via student updates at the committee meetings. Following a discussion with the Chair of the Committee, it was agreed that 'student business' would become a standing agenda item and that the student representatives would be invited to present papers where appropriate.

Already, the concept of a PGR Community, with the need to draw together the PGR student population across the Highlands and Islands and beyond, and address student needs, has been established. It is hoped that these developments and opportunities will also eventually increase interdisciplinary collaborations across the UHI network.

The entirety of the work undertaken relating to the development of a student-led PGR Community has been done voluntarily in addition to existing study commitments, and has been non-funded.

3) Outline the project or initiative's outcome(s) within the university and beyond with relevant supporting evidence, metrics or testimony where appropriate (max 400 words).

The development and enhancement of a PGR Community is difficult to measure as progress should be ongoing and regularly evaluated in order to identify current priorities. However, in order to measure outcomes, priorities were set in September 2014 and presented in a paper discussed at the UHI RDC. An update on the short-term priorities is detailed below.

Short-Term Actions (September 2014 to February 2015)

Meeting with Principal and Vice-Chancellor: a meeting was held in December 2014 with Professor Clive Mulholland to present and discuss research student priorities.

Student Induction: each new PGR student was emailed personally following their induction, outlining a few ways of how best to keep in touch throughout their studies.

Student Mentoring: a mentoring scheme specifically for PGR students to mentor final year undergraduate students was created for 2014/2015.

PGR Representative Group (PGRRG): a call has now gone out to all PGR students asking for volunteers to sit on a PGRRG. It is hoped this group will take responsibility for oversight of PGR representation on committees where appropriate, and identifying relevant priorities.

RDC Student Business: a standing agenda item has now been added to the RDC agenda, and student representatives are encouraged to present papers where appropriate.

UHI Students' Association (UHISA) PGR Society: it was hoped that a UHISA PGR Society would be created in early 2014/2015 but there does not appear to be the appetite for this within the student community at present. Instead, the Dean of Research and Dean of Students have been approached regarding possibilities relating to increasing opportunities amongst the PGR Community.

PGR Website and Social Media: conversations relating to the development of a PGR website and accompanying social media are ongoing.

Showcasing PGR Research: initial scoping work on outward presentation of UHI postgraduate research is ongoing.

PGR Community Development: discussions relating to further PGR Community developments are ongoing.

Communication via the Graduate School: the Graduate School is assisting in distributing student-led updates to all PGR students. The last email was sent in December 2014 and another update will be sent in the next few weeks.

UHI Research Conference (November 2014)

In addition to the outcomes above, there was also PGR input into discussions relating to November's Conference. The final programme included two student-led sessions, which received positive initial feedback from student and staff participants.

Next Steps

The wider PGR Community project is ongoing, but significant progress has been made since November 2013