



COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE FOR POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION AND SCHOLARSHIP

DATE: October 17th, 2022
 TIME: 10h00 - 13h00
 LINK: MS Teams: [Click here to join the meeting](#)
 CHAIR: Professor S Burton

SUPPORTING DOCUMENT

Annexure 1: Minutes of Previous meeting (7 July 2022)
 Annexure 2: Election of the Steering Committee
 Annexure 3: Terms of Reference
 Annexure 4: Thuso Resource – Information Request

AGENDA

#	Item	Presenter	Annexure
1	Welcome and introductions	Prof S Burton (Chairperson) (SB)	
2.1	Confirmation of Minutes of meeting of July 7 th	SB	1
2.2	Matters arising from the Minutes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Summary of actions and activities proposed for the CoP - Other Matters arising 	SB	
3	Election of Steering Committee	USAf	2, 3
4	Working Group on postgraduate funding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduction of members - Discussion of plan 	SB All	
5	Update on AECRS, Thuso Resources and Thuso Connect	SB, JJ	4
6	Topic: Models for supervision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Short presentations - Discussion 	SB	
7	Proposal of topics for next meetings	SB	

	- Discussion	All	
8	Date for next meeting	SB	
9	Closing remarks		



**UNIVERSITIES
SOUTH AFRICA**

Annexure 1

MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE ON POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION AND SCHOLARSHIP (PGES)

**THURSDAY 7 JULY 2022 at 10h00
(ONLINE)**

Interim Steering Committee Chairperson: Prof Stephanie Burton

MINUTES

OPENING AND WELCOME

Prof Burton opened the meeting and welcomed the attending CoP members. A particular welcome was extended to Prof Thoko Mayekiso, Chair of the RISG.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 31 MARCH 2022

The minutes of the inaugural meeting of the CoP were adopted as an accurate record of the proceedings.

MATTERS ARISING

A presentation of the CHE National Report on Doctoral Qualifications was included in the agenda as item 5. Elements of other matters identified as discussion points for the PGES CoP formed part of agenda items 6, 7 and 8.

ELECTION OF STEERING COMMITTEE

- 4.1. An Interim Steering Committee comprising Profs Thoko Mayekiso, Jesika Singh, Chris Nhlapo and Stephanie Burton (as Chair) had guided the establishment of the CoP PGES to date.
- 4.2. The process and ToR for the election of a Steering Committee to take office on 1 January 2023 were provided in Annexure 2 to the agenda. A list of CoP members would be circulated with a link for the online submission of nominations. Nominations would close on 22 July 2022, and the submissions would be presented at the last CoP meeting for the year. Once a Steering Committee had been appointed, the members would vote for the Chair and Deputy Chair using the online poll.

4.3. It was agreed that:

Ms van Rhyn would send out a reminder to submit nominations before 22 July.

PRESENTATION ON CHE NATIONAL REPORT ON DOCTORAL QUALIFICATIONS

(Prof Andrew Leitch, Emeritus Professor, NMU)

It was noted that:

- 5.1. The NRF had proposed that the CHE conduct a review to assess the impact of a variety of factors and developments on the quality of Doctoral qualifications offered by South African universities, and to consider their standing in the international landscape.
- 5.2. A qualification Standard for Doctoral degrees published in 2018 set out the minimum criteria for the awarding of both general and professional qualifications. In 2019, 23 public and 5 private institutions were provided with a template for a self-evaluation of the extent to which their Doctoral qualifications met this standard. Review panels also conducted virtual site visits in October and November 2020.
- 5.3. Challenges experienced in the review process were the fairly significant differences in what institutions were offering at Doctoral level, as well as in their responses to and understanding of the review, and the comprehensiveness of the submissions.
- 5.4. Final reports (checked by the institutions for accuracy) were approved by the CHE in June 2021, and a National Report was prepared by a five-person writing team.
- 5.5. In summary, key findings related to the following aspects:
 - Selection and admission processes. Selection and admission policies were often lacking, out of date or inconsistently applied across the institution. There was also significant variation in terms of the level of preparedness expected of candidates, and in the clarity around selection and admission roles and responsibilities. A particular concern was the common practice of requiring the submission and approval of a full proposal before allowing candidates to register. This meant that candidates had to develop a proposal without the support and resources of the university.
 - Supervision. The need for more supervisory capacity and ongoing training across the sector was well known. Other concerns that emerged from the review were the challenges that could come with outsourcing supervision to external individuals, and the lack of ethical awareness and professional conduct in some institutions.
 - Assessment. Clear and explicit policies for the selection and appointment of external examiners and for the examination process needed to be in place and consistently applied. The fact that few institutions could provide evidence of assessment beyond the examination of the thesis was concerning. This meant that of the six nodes listed in the Doctoral Standard for examining quality in the Doctoral cycle, only one was addressed.
 - Graduate attributes. The review found a general lack of awareness and understanding amongst students and academic and support staff of the graduate attributes contained in the Doctoral Standard and how they should be monitored. The integration of the graduate attributes in all stages of a Doctoral qualification needed to be actively pursued.

- 5.6. Although a number of shortcomings were identified, the National Report also listed 30 examples of best practice that would be worth emulating to improve the quality of Doctoral qualifications. These included the establishment of communities of practice for Doctoral students, and various forms of international partnerships. Requiring oral defence of a thesis also appeared to be valuable.
- 5.7. The review concluded that a number of the currently offered qualifications did not meet the Doctoral Standard, but that those that did (which were the majority) were generally at a level equivalent to the international standard. The Report ended with a number of recommendations for institutions as well as the broader higher education sector to consider.

In response to questions and comments, Prof Leitch and Prof Burton highlighted the following:

- 5.8. The recent publication on a national tracer study of Doctoral graduates in South Africa conducted by CREST was not considered in the National Report, but the team was aware of other parallel publications, and the two reports could certainly speak to each other.
- 5.9. Having international examiners did not necessarily add value to the examination process; what was more important was the independence of examiners. There did seem to be cases of collusion in the sense of agreements to examine one another's students, or the repeated use of colleagues with whom supervisors were on good terms. Such practices foregrounded the need to have comprehensive policies in place for the appointment of examiners, and to ensure that these were interpreted and applied consistently across an institution. Policies with respect to the use of internal examiners were also very variable across the sector. Close scrutiny of the examiner nomination process by Faculty Higher Degree Committees or Doctoral Degree Committees could play an important role in curbing bad practices.
- 5.10. Although this had to be a consensus decision involving a number of role players (including the supervisor and Head of Department), formally informing students that they had not met the required standard was the responsibility of the PG Studies Committee and the Dean of the Faculty. However, if proper quality and progress monitoring and reporting had taken place all the way through the study, a negative outcome should not come as a shock. The need for a clear appeals process was also identified as a weakness during the review.
- 5.11. The general recommendation was there should be a central institutional policy on postgraduate admissions and assessments, with faculties having their own implementation plans based on their individual context and requirements.
- 5.12. In institutions where supervisor-student MoUs existed and were applied, they proved to be useful tools for addressing issues before they became insurmountable. However, it was critical that MoUs be in place right from the start and be explicit about the steps to take should specific challenges present themselves. The agreements also needed to have gravitas and be taken seriously, which was a function of leadership in the university.

- 5.13. How the recommendations of the report would be taken forward was up to the CHE, but the universities had already been required to submit improvement plans based on the findings of the review. In cases where qualifications did not meet the Doctoral Standard, the National Standards & Reviews Subcommittee of the CHE would be putting steps and reporting timelines in place for the actioning of improvement plans.
- 5.14. Prof Burton noted that that the National Report highlighted a number of areas that the CoP PGES should take forward as topics for the sector. These included:
- How best to support students in the writing of their proposals.
 - The entire issue of supervision.
 - Training in deeper ethics and research integrity.
 - Questions around graduate schools or Doctoral CoPs.
 - The monitoring of student progress.

REPORT ON 'GLOBAL CONVERSATIONS ON POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION: EXPLORING PAN-AFRICAN CONNECTIONS' WEBINAR

Prof Burton gave feedback on the webinar that had taken place in the last week of May 2022. A report on the event and a list of contacts would be posted on the CoP PGES website.

It was noted that:

- 6.1. The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) in the USA had proposed an open discussion on postgraduate education, and particularly how to build partnerships and collaborate across Africa. The webinar convened in collaboration with the CGS (represented by Suzanne Ortega), the SARCHI Chair Teaching & Learning at the University of Johannesburg (Prof Shireen Motala), and Prof Burton as Interim Chair of the PGES CoP had been attended by about 100 people.
- 6.2. Dr Charles Ambler of the University of Texas led a panel on Postgraduate Education in Africa, which included representatives from the University of Ghana, the American University in Cairo, and the Durban University of Technology. Issues discussed included how to support internationalisation and student mobility; partnering in the preparation of future academics; and opportunities for developing better systems for collaboration. It was clear that resources, how to include students in collaborations, and models for collaborative supervision were common issues.
- 6.3. A roundtable discussion focused on where networks already existed; how new networks could be built; and which kinds of universities made the best networks. It emerged that the more technological institutions and research-intensive institutions collaborated most effectively.
- 6.4. Prof Singh commented that universities abroad seemed to have student mobility built into their Masters or Doctoral degree programmes. This was not the case in South Africa, although many institutions did it individually on a small scale.
- 6.5. It was agreed that:**
- The matter of student mobility, including providing students a 'safe landing' and support, would be added to the list of topics for the CoP PGES.

PROPOSAL FOR WORKING GROUP ON POSTGRADUATE FUNDING

- 7.1. At present, only 1% of students were funded from Honours to Doctoral level. This was an urgent matter on the CoP PGES agenda as inadequate funding could compromise the Doctoral study experience and the capacity of students to cope. A working group therefore needed to be established to identify the issues and how to address them, and to consider funding models and how resources could be leveraged to support postgraduate students. There was capacity to do some research in this regard.
- 7.2. A call for volunteers would go out after the meeting, and any members interested in participating should contact Prof Burton and/or Ms van Rhyn.
- 7.3. **It was agreed that:**

It would be good if the working group could table recommendations at the last RISG meeting of the year in early October, which would be a joint meeting with the DVCs Research.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ADVANCING EARLY CAREER ACADEMICS PROJECT

Prof Burton updated the colleagues on progress in the four-pronged project which was supported by DSI and implemented through USAf.

It was noted that:

- 8.1. The establishment of a strategy group focused on postgraduate education had been addressed through the creation of the CoP PGES. The PGES website was now live and could be accessed at <https://pges.usaf.ac.za>. Partnerships on specific focus areas would be developed, and reports and recordings of events would be uploaded.
- 8.2. It had been agreed that the development of a system for monitoring the impact of interventions would be embarked upon in 2023.
- 8.3. A project manager and researcher had been appointed for the establishment of a nationally coordinated mentorship resource platform, and a survey of current practices at local and international institutions was underway. A report would be provided quite soon, after which the online resource for early career academics seeking mentorship would be set up on one of the USAf platforms. People in the field who were prepared to serve as mentors for early career academics could volunteer their services, and academics from the universities would also be invited to participate.
- 8.4. As a national toolbox, a central repository of open access modules, programmes and other resources at institutions was being built on the USAf platform. Work had started on collecting resources, and universities would be contacted regularly for information on new initiatives so that the toolbox was kept up to date. The hope was to launch it before the end of the year. Consultation with the universities would be extensive to ensure that the process was open and transparent, and that all benefitted from it.

TOPIC FOR NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that:

- Postgraduate mobility and research ethics and integrity would be added to the previously conceived list of topics for the CoP.

- The focus in the next meeting would be on supervision models, and particularly training for academics who would be supervising postgraduate students.

CLOSING REMARKS: PROF JESIKA SINGH ON BEHALF OF PROF THOKO MAYEKISO

Prof Singh thanked Prof Burton for chairing the meeting and expressed appreciation for Prof Leitch's very important presentation. She assured the colleagues of the RISG's appreciation for the work being done by the CoP PGES. The USAf team were also thanked for the administrative support.

CLOSURE AND NEXT MEETING

Prof Burton thanked the members for their participation and noted that comments and suggestions before the next meeting could be submitted to her or Ms van Rhyn.

The last meeting for the year would take place in October. A calendar invitation would be sent out in the next couple of weeks.

END