Building a Graduate School at Abertay University: A Case Study

Dr Nia White
Head of the Abertay Graduate School

- Graduate Schools and research community

- Abertay University and our Graduate School
    - What worked well for us
    - How have we achieved our change

- Discussion questions

- ## Why are Graduate Schools useful?
  - Focus & peer group – virtual or physical
  - Lead, advocate, coordinate
  - Enhance PGRS experience beyond what they can derive from their supervisors
    - Varied experience and style?
    - Recognition that RDs are a broad training for a range of careers?
  - Develop highly-skilled researchers to achieve impact across the whole economy; the next generation of researchers to maintain national capability

- ## A sustainable community of scholars

- HEA Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (2015)
    - Majority of students (82%) were satisfied with their research programme experience, but research culture was rated lowest (60% agreed that they had opportunities to become involved in the wider research community beyond their department).

- Purpose and character of the institution?
    - Diverse/ nuanced experiences within HE /Graduate Schools
    - Abertay University:
        - Inculcating inter- and multi- disciplinary working and research skills
        - Modern; supportive; close community and interaction; practice focussed; professional development.

- A compact, focussed University with around 4000 students, 200 academic staff, 130 PGRS, 320 PGT.
  - Flat structure: 2 VPs & 5 Schools
  - Computer Games, Cybersecurity, Food & Drink, Bioscience, Sport Science, Psychology, MHN, HRM, Business and Law………

- Strategic plan (2015-20) & cross-cutting Theme based research strategy R-LINCS (2013)

- The Abertay Graduate School was launched in September 2014.

- Developments were informed by:
  - a root-and-branch review
  - survey of sector good practice
  - feedback from PGR degree supervisors and students (Graduate School Forum).

Our Graduate School

- All Abertay postgraduate students (PGT & PGR) and researchers have membership of the GS

- Centrally located flexible study and social spaces – a forum in which they can meet, work and learn with other researchers and postgraduates from across the University.

- Training and professional development opportunities
    - On-line
    - Workshops, masterclasses, modules, one-to-one
    - Placement opportunities
    - Beginning to Teach in HE programme (PGWT)
    - Public engagement and outreach opportunities
    - Enterprise opportunities
    - Networks

- Access to equipment and facilities regardless of host School

- Promote integration and a multi-disciplinary ethos

- Root and branch review
  - Revised Regulations *esp. formal and regular monitoring and progression review*
  - Revised RKE Governance Structure
  - Revised processes and practices across the University
  - Alignment with our Research Strategy and priority areas
  - Integrated working with Schools and Services

- Graduate School Forum
  - Stakeholder voice to influence GS development

- Flexible space with dedicated staffing and an open door policy

- Combined student and supervisor handbook which reveals the role and responsibilities of each to the other and examples of good practice
  - VLE & web pages

RESEARCH DEGREES STUDENT AND SUPERVISOR HANDBOOK

What worked well for us:

- Supervisor training and development

- Mandatory 2 day Induction Programme and fixed start dates
  - Compliance training
  - Clarify expectations, regulations, policy and practice
  - Build cohorts

- Flexible approach to researcher development and record (Vitae RDF)

- Make use of experienced staff, networks and partnerships wherever possible

- Mandatory presentation at our Graduate School Conference

- Beginning to Teach in HE programme (PGWT)
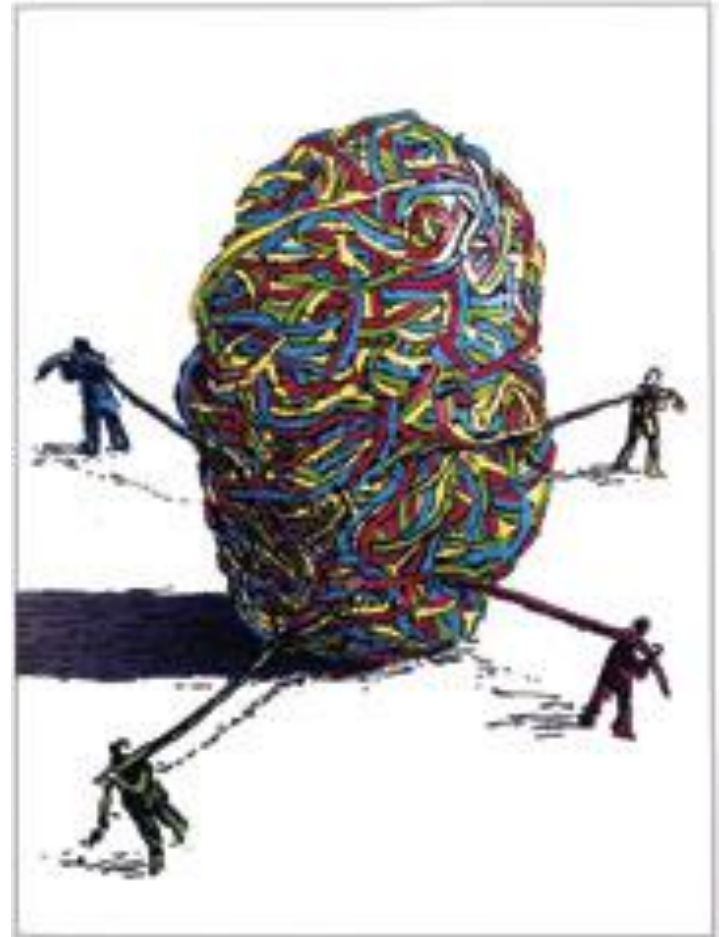
- Responsive and we will evolve …………..

Interconnectedness – you need authority or serious influence across the institution
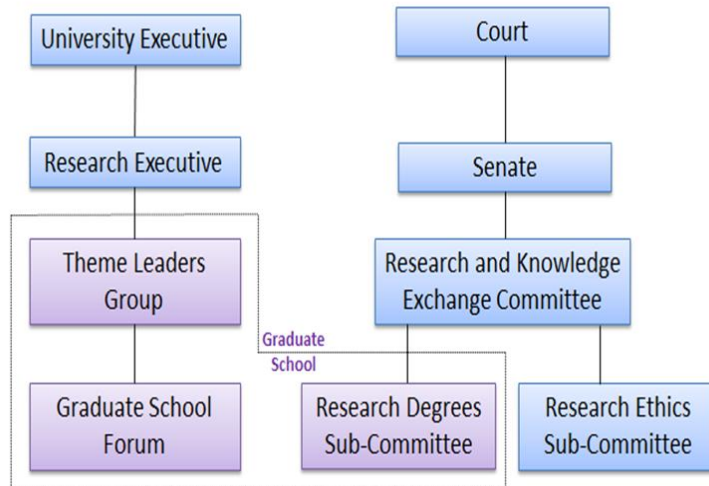
Abertay Research Governance Structure

For your institution:

Q1. How can you best provide a sense of community to PGRS to enhance their experience?

Q2. What are the institutional barriers to change? How can these be overcome?

Q3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a pan-University *versus* a School/Faculty based GS?

Q4. Can a virtual GS work? How can we facilitate chance encounters, integration , multiple networks, peer support and learning communities, engagement?

Q5. Can we teach inter- or cross-disciplinary working and innovation?

Q6. Supervisors are key. How do we bring them with us (their own experience *versus* modern doctorate)?

Q7. How do we support students with teaching responsibilities or other academic roles?

Q8. Is culture change possible? How can this be achieved?

Keep your face always toward the sunshine - and shadows will fall behind you.
Walt Whitman