ARC Practitioner Group Updates
July 2023

Admissions Julie Kelly	The group met virtually in June with over 90 members joining the meeting to hear a presentation from David Kernohan from Wonkhe. DK covered the challenges that the LLE would bring and the fact that the application numbers (especially as application numbers rise) need to be better smoothed across the sector. The meeting also received a presentation from UUK on how the sector is handling criminal convictions (which is patchy!) and was informed of the approach being taken in Scotland where they are setting a baseline of best practice. The intention that this approach then gets rolled out across the UK. UCAS also presented on the following topics: J2AM – "The Journey to a Million" there are now a series of essays on the topic of rising application numbers which you can find here https://www.ucas.com/about-us/journey-million. ECD - the impact of rising application numbers is not being felt evenly and there have been requests for the Equal Consideration Deadline which is due to fall on the 31st January in 2024 to be bought forward. The rationale being for universities that are heavily subscribed this just gives more time for applicants to apply and less time for them to process (mainly decline) their applications. Confirmation & Clearing – they explained their plans for the summer and outlined the major changes for this cycle, ie the ability for applicants to see why they have not been confirmed (ie because the university is still waiting for results) and acceptance of your clearing choice will open at 1pm from 3pm previously. UCAS are still considering their role and strategy around international student recruitment and I'm representing ARC at a 3rd roundtable discussion early July.
Scotland & Northern Ireland Steven Logie	**Scottish & Northern Ireland ARC Practitioner Group, held on Friday 19 May 2023 via MS Teams.** The Group was joined by colleagues from SAAS, who gave an overview of plans to enhance attendance data management. Discussion focussed on the proposed benefits of this project to: reduce reliance on current file transfer process; increase efficiency & accuracy; reduce manual handing errors; and reduce data risk. The Group welcomed Ester Ruskuc, Vice Principal (Strategy, Policy & Planning, t University of St Andrews), who led a session on how colleagues feel they can influence strategically

	within their institutions and how they are coping in the post-pandemic environment. Common themes included: increases in international students; retention issues; student accommodation shortages; student behavioural issues; technology forcing change (such as AI); and increased workload. The Convenor reported that he had convened a session to explore issues on managing gender recognition from a student records perspective. Updates were provided from ARC Executive, the QAA and Universities Scotland. The Group discussed preparedness for HESA Data Futures, including reflecting on the challenges with some suppliers and ways to bring relevant colleagues in the ScotNI sector together. Colleagues reflected on post-Covid exams and assessment issues, including the balance of on campus versus online exams. The UCU MAB was impacts and mitigation was discussed. Colleagues consider arrangements for the processing of student data relating to relevant unspent criminal convictions & charges. The meeting dates for 23/24 were considered and it was agreed to pilot 30 minute informal monthly meetings.
UKVI Jo Wright	The UKVI Practitioner Group has not met since the previous Executive Committee. We are scheduled to meet on 28th July in a joint conference style session with the Postgraduate Group, when we expect to focus on the upcoming policy changes (e.g. to dependant visas) as well as UKVI operational matters in the run up to next academic year. From the latest Education Advisory Group interactions, the Home Office is currently receiving 500 applications per day – CAS are being issued early to help manage summer peak. No significant change in student demographics compared to last year. The Group Chair and Deputy Chair have had concerns raised from members about the removal of the Premium Customer Support Team, and will be seeking to raise and discuss these concerns at the July meeting. No update is yet forthcoming with regard to UKVI policy on remote learning. On the marking and assessment boycott, UKVI have advised as follows: • Discretion will be applied if results will be released within 8 weeks - they can still apply for the Graduate Route. • If longer than 8 weeks, they will need to apply for new student leave grant, which will be looked upon sympathetically.
Assessments Joanne Coward	

Postgraduate Rachel Birds	July 2023 Postgraduate Practitioner Group The Postgraduate Practitioner Group held an online 'brown bag lunch' on Friday 28 April. The theme for the meetings was 'PGR Careers and Employability' and we encouraged our members to open up the invitation to some of their colleagues in careers or placements-related roles. It was nice to see a mixture of faces, new and familiar, at the event. Attendees discussed three areas: formal careers guidance at your University; providing networking opportunities; and enterprise and entrepreneurship support. These were considered in the context of initiatives which institutions were putting in place specifically for PGRs, as well as generic provision across all levels. An in-person full day event was held at the University of Nottingham on Friday 26 May. The theme for the day was PGR systems and the room was buzzing. It is clearly a hot topic and stirred up some lively debate, not least with the suppliers who kindly attended to showcase their solutions. Presentations were provided by Cayuse (Graduate Education Manager), SkillsForge and Bip Group (bespoke solutions) and each supplier took questions and engaged with some of their clients in the room, which members found helpful. UKRI attended to give a demonstration of the new funding service which is being rolled out through 2023 to replace Je-S. From January 2024, all Research Council opportunities will be launched and managed only in this new environment. The remainder of the agenda was given over to members' own experiences and practices with presentations on: - Implementing an internal bespoke PGR system – reflections and lessons learnt at the Universities of Manchester and Bournemouth. - Making do: Running an anonymised selection process with (almost) no resources at UCL. - Achieving buy-in for a new PGR Examination Process Module in PhD Manager/GEM at the University of Westminster – The Challenges and the ummmmm Challenges. - Raising the PGR voice (and moving our application form online) at Sheffield Hallam University. Alongside attendance at meetings, our members have been engaging via email on topics of interest including regulations for distance learning research students, IELTS requirements and minimum word counts for research degrees.
	Our spring meeting was held online on 21st March, and we had over 100 attendees.

Quality Assurance
Jacky Mack
	We explored three areas at this meeting:
	
	   – **Ofsted and Apprenticeship**s exploring themes from recent inspection outcomes, and we heard about specific members' experiences of Ofsted inspection, ESFA audit and what was involved in a Designated Quality Body review visit. We had input from the Adult Learning Improvement Network & Fellowship of Inspection Nominees, the University of the West of England and Northumbria University
	
	   – The University of Suffolk presented their findings from their recent review of **Extenuating Circumstances** policies and systems.
	
	   - We had a discussion session on **Curriculum Management Systems**, and an overview of members' experiences in selecting and implementing different systems with input from the University of Huddersfield, the University of Liverpool and the University of Bedfordshire.
	
	After polling the group, we had hoped to have the summer meeting as hybrid in the London area, but did not have any volunteers to host so we have reverted to an online meeting which is scheduled for 20th July. Topics will include how academic quality policies can respond to Artificial Intelligence/Chat GPT, and we will have an update from the OfS on the Lifelong Loan Entitlement.

SROC Marian Hilditch	
Student Casework Lysandre de-la-Haye	
Timetabling	