Minutes from the Opening meeting and the ordinary PhD committee meeting

Time: Thursday, 22 January 2015 at 9.00-11.00
Place: Building 1431, rooms 021 and 023, Nordre Ringgade 1, 8000 Aarhus C

Present: Ernst-Martin Füchtbauer, Kurt Thomas Jensen, Anders Møller, Kristine Engemann Jensen, Christian Andersen, Heidi Gytz Olesen, Rasmus Kock Flygaard, Sigrid Schøler Nielsen, Morten Graversgaard, Daniel Søndergaard Skov and Jes Madsen

On videolink: Lis Wollesen de Jonge, Jan Tind Sørensen, Guilherme de Moura Maciel and Marielle Babineau

Apologies for absence: Anne Kjær Laustsen, Henrik Stapelfeldt and Thue Bording

GSST secretariat: Bente Lynge Hansen and Rikke J. Ljungmann (for the minutes)

Agenda - opening meeting

1. Rules of procedure for the PhD committee
2. Information concerning the PhD committee’s tasks
3. Election of chairman
4. Election of vice-chairman
5. PhD Committee meeting dates in 2015

Agenda – ordinary meeting:

7. Approval of minutes from the last PhD committee meeting – 4 December 2014
8. Approval of agenda
9. Announcements – Overview of assessment committees, exemptions, etc. for the period 26 November 2014 to 15 January 2015
10. Involvement of boards and committees – the PhD committee
11. Generic skills course catalogue and website set-up
12. Statistics courses

Minutes from the Opening meeting:

Ad 1. Rules of procedure for the PhD committee
The retiring chairman of the PhD committee Kurt Thomas Jensen informed the committee members of the Rules of procedure for the PhD committee.

There are 12 members, namely 6 members of staff and 6 PhD students. The former are elected for three years and the latter for one year at a time. The members meet regularly – usually three to four times a year – and can invite other people to the meetings as observers if necessary, however the latter do not have the right to vote.

All members can submit items to be discussed at the meetings. When voting on a subject, it is a question of simple majority. At least half of the statutory members must be present to make the PhD committee quorate.

**Ad 2. Information concerning the PhD committee’s tasks**
The retiring chairman of the PhD committee Kurt Thomas Jensen informed the committee members of the PhD committee’s tasks. These include for instance:

- Approving PhD courses
- Approving applications for credits, exemptions, etc.
- Making recommendations regarding the composition of assessment committees
- Discussing various matters relating to the PhD school and making recommendations hereon to the head of PhD school.

The chairman and the vice-chairman prepare the agenda for each meeting and can also make decisions in between meetings, if necessary.

**Ad 3. Election of chairman**
Associate professor Kurt Thomas Jensen (Department of Bioscience) was re-elected.

**Ad 4. Election of vice-chairman**
PhD student Morten Graversgaard (Department of Agroecology) was elected.

**Ad 5. PhD Committee meeting dates in 2015**
Kurt Thomas Jensen suggested that the PhD committee meetings would be held in connection with the heads of programme meetings. The meeting dates would be decided from time to time.

Jes Madsen mentioned that in Mid-April, i.e. 14 or 15 April, an international panel would be coming to visit in connection with the international evaluation of GSST and that a meeting would be set up between the panel and the PhD committee. In addition, a meeting would most likely be held between the panel and the Chairman and Vice-chairman also.

**Ad 6. Misc.**
None

Minutes from the ordinary PhD committee meeting:

**Ad 7. Approval of minutes from the last PhD committee meeting – 4 December 2014**
The minutes were approved.
Ad 8. Approval of agenda
Agenda was approved.

Ad 9. Announcements – Overview of assessment committees, exemptions, etc. for the period 26 November 2014 to 15 January 2015
There were no comments to the announcements. They were approved.

Jes Madsen pointed out that any comments to the overviews would always be welcomed.

10. Involvement of boards and committees – the PhD committee
Kurt Thomas Jensen mentioned that the topic had been discussed at the last PhD committee meeting on account of a note from the Dean’s office concerning the involvement of boards and committees to stimulate bottom-up processes. As deadline for commenting is 6 February 2015, the topic was debated one last time at the present meeting.

Molecular Biology and Genetics had discussed the topic. The programme committee felt that in general more responsibility should be delegated, e.g. in connection with half-year evaluations, could the head of school be left out in the evaluation cycle. Likewise in connection with approving members of the assessment committees. Furthermore, MBG had discussed whether the evaluation and acceptance of fully financed PhD students could be delegated purely to the local programme committees without involving the admissions committee. MBG felt that it becomes problematic when mixing the financing and evaluation processes.

Jes Madsen noted that the central admissions committee helps ensure that all PhD students are evaluated on the basis of the same criteria and high level of quality. He agreed that it could be difficult when mixing financing and quality issues across disciplines, however, this does not differ from the situation at a number of funding agencies. Jes Madsen said that coverage (inndækning) had raised new issues to be debated, and some of them already are, but that this issue was not really for the PhD committee to discuss. However, he would consider the suggestion concerning the half-year evaluations and assessment committees.

Comment: A description explaining procedures from the moment of application to the moment of acceptance as a PhD student could be useful – for both students and supervisors. It could be made visible on the GSST website in connection with applying.
Action: Jes Madsen would consider such a description.

Suggestion: Many PhD students do not know about the programme committees and the PhD committee. Could it be mentioned at the GSST Introduction day at the same time as explaining a bit more about the structure of the university and the GSST. Perhaps also be described in welcoming letters along with more info on what to do if someone wants to “get voted in”.

Comment: Some of this info is already mentioned at the Introduction day, so perhaps the programmes should play a larger role here.

Comment: It can be difficult to communicate with those departments that the PhD students are grouped with in the election process, since the PhD students at the various departments/programmes not necessarily know each other. This can also make it more difficult to represent each other.
With these comments the debate ended. Kurt Thomas Jensen will extract the points made both at the last meeting and the present meeting, and they will then be sent to the Dean’s office.

**Ad 11. Generic skills course catalogue and website set-up**

At an earlier meeting, the now retiring Vice-chairman Christian Andersen had been asked to look over the GSST generic skills course catalogue. The proposal was presented at the last PhD committee meeting and had been discussed locally between the last meeting and this one. Christian Andersen pointed out that he had received a number of inputs and suggestions and had tried to encompass these in the course catalogue.

A number of new courses were therefore suggested along with those already offered. The proposed course catalogue (and most of the courses) was then debated at the present meeting:

**Teaching courses:**
- Science Teaching: General satisfaction with the course, could perhaps benefit from making the lectures more differentiated at some points.

**Communication courses:**
Christian Andersen had received a number of different suggestions on this topic, and the proposal tries to match these.

- Scientific Presentation: Part of the Scientific Writing and Communication course already offered. It had been commented that the present course seeks to encompass too much, and it was therefore suggested to split it up in two courses. It had been commented that it was important to offer both types of courses.

- Research Communication (Forskningsformidling): Comments suggested that there was an interest in keeping this course.

- Interdisciplinary Communication: Some people had commented that it could be difficult to communicate with people from other fields, and that other approaches were needed to communicate/disseminate interdisciplinary topics.

- Scientific writing: The other part of the present Scientific Writing and Communication course – see comments above under Scientific Presentation.

- Academic English: People had commented that it is important to offer such a course.

**Organisation and management skills:**
- Project Management: Comments had revealed that two courses - each with a different focus - were actually wished for. One focusing on managing one’s own PhD project, and one aimed at people with a different career goal than academia.

- Leadership and Research Management: Jes Madsen commented that it should probably be aimed at people at a higher level in academia. However, the most relevant parts could perhaps be incorporated into the Project Management course or perhaps it could be held as a two-hour workshop as a kind of career planning event.

**Scientific skills:**
- Statistics: To be discussed under item 12.

- Writing Grant Proposals: A number of people had asked for a course with this focus.
- Scientific Visualisation: This course was suggested by people from Nanoscience, who had taken a similar course offered there. Jes Madsen asked whether it might be more relevant to offer it as a workshop instead. It was commented that no matter the format, it should be ensured that it should include more high-end visualisation and discussion of this.

After the review of the proposal, Christian Andersen suggested that it be implemented from 2016.

General comments made during the discussion:
- Some of the courses look rather similar, could some of them perhaps be merged somewhat?
- Would it be possible to offer more specialised courses, perhaps with fewer participants and fewer ECTS?
- Could some of the courses be held as workshops instead, e.g. Scientific Presentation?
- The suggested website set-up gave a better overview of the courses when structured thematically.
- Would it be possible to have more condensed courses to accommodate people from outside Aarhus? To this, Jes Madsen commented that a more thorough discussion about location and distribution of courses would follow at a later stage.
- Suggestions on how to advertise the courses: Locally - Heads of programmes advertise them to the PhD students, but also inform the supervisors of it being necessary/a good idea that the PhD students take these courses.

Jes Madsen asked if any of the existing courses were left out, to which Christian Andersen commented that the course World of Research did not receive any comments.

Jes Madsen also informed the PhD committee that a National Scientific Code of Conduct is now in place and part of introducing it would include courses on the subject at all academic levels. Therefore, this will be arranged later, and maybe even be made compulsory.

Finally, it was asked whether any courses were missing, and the answer was No.

**Next meeting:** To be debated further at the next meeting.

**Ad 12. Statistics courses**
Based on a discussion at the last PhD committee meeting and written input from the course lecturer, it was discussed whether the current GSST statistics course could be offered in a more condensed form. In his written input, the course lecturer had pointed out that it takes time for people to get into the subject, and it is therefore difficult to make the course form more condensed than it already is. However, one possibility could be to transmit one lecture per week via videolink instead to encourage participation of people from other locations.

**Decision:** It was agreed to keep the current course structure.

**Ad 13. Misc.**
Jes Madsen had an announcement to the heads of programme concerning proposals to AUFF’s PhD prize: The deadline for incoming suggestions is 6 February 2015. Only three prizes will be awarded. An e-mail concerning this had been sent. Proposed candidates must have been awarded the PhD degree in 2014 or no later than January 2015.

There was a question relating to teaching for PhD students on the five year programme. It related to whether PhD students on their first year of the five year programme were allowed to teach. Jes Madsen answered that there could be local department rules recommending that these PhD students do not teach, but as the rules are at the time of the present meeting, all PhD students admitted on a bachelor’s degree
(with or without credits) are offered teaching if they obtain PhD scholarship funding through AU. Each PhD student then has to choose whether he or she wants to teach and/or the number of semesters. Jes Madsen also pointed out that the rules may be subject to change before long.

The meeting ended at 10.45.

**Action**
- Description explaining procedures from the moment of application to the moment of acceptance as a PhD student to be considered

**Who**
- Jes Madsen

**To be discussed at the next meeting:**
- The proposed course catalogue