Periodic Review of Postgraduate Research Programmes: Procedures

This document is a rolling 'for information' guide on the Periodic Review of PGR Programmes. It will be updated following a PGR review with practical information for the next Faculty and panel undertaking periodic review.

1. Context

1.1 Periodic review is part of the Quality, Monitoring and Enhancement Framework for Postgraduate Research Education at the University of Southampton. More details can be found in the Quality Handbook.

2. Aims

2.1 The aims of the periodic review process are:

- to ensure compliance of a Faculty with the University's Regulations for Research Degrees and Higher Doctorates, including the University's Code of Practice for Research Candidature and Supervision;
- to identify and promote the sharing of good practice;
- to consider changes to provision which will enhance the student experience.

3. Timing

3.1 Reviews take place every five years (or more frequently if considered appropriate either by the Faculty Graduate School Committee, PGR QME Subcommittee, or Academic Quality and Standards Committee). The five-year schedule, as agreed by the RDGC Advisory Group is as follows:

	Semester 1	Semester 2
2013/14	n/a	Researcher Development and Graduate Centre (RDGC)
2014/15	Faculty of Engineering and the Environment (FEE)	Faculty of Medicine
2015/16	Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) University of Chichester	Faculty of Social and Human Sciences (FSHS) - excl. taught doctorates
2016/17	Faculty of Physical Sciences and Engineering (FPSE)	Faculty of Business and Law (FBL)
2017/18	Faculty of Natural and Environmental Sciences (FNES)	Faculty of Humanities/FSHMS taught doctorates

3.2 Faculties plan, organise and fund their own Periodic Review events, including scheduling the date, organising the venue, identifying the panel, preparing papers for submission, and paying the external advisor. The responsibility for planning falls on the Faculty Director of the Graduate School, supported by Student and Academic Administration staff (either the Faculty Graduate School Office or the Faculty Curriculum and Quality Assurance Team (who will have arranged similar events through the University's Programme Validation process)) and/or the Faculty Academic Registrar. Support can be provided by the Quality, Standards and Accreditation Team and the Director of the University Doctoral College.

3.3 The PGR QME Subcommittee is responsible for following up with Faculties who fail to organise their review according to this schedule.

4. Scope of the review

4.1 The review will cover:

- the research environment in all its aspects including alignment with research policy and activity and the currency of research provision;
- the management of processes relevant to research students in the Faculty;
- the experience of research students undertaking MPhil and PhD programmes, including any students taking a degree by existing published work or a higher degree;
- students' experience of admission, induction, research skills training, supervision, progress monitoring and preparation for examination;
- processes for obtaining student feedback, discussing students' concerns, seeking their advice on programme developments and informing them of actions taken in response to their concerns;
- the provision of learning resources for research students;
- the provision of academic and social opportunities for research students;
- the provision of information for students;
- the provision of training and support for supervisors and examiners;
- employment for students following graduation and the support offered to help them find suitable work.

5. Review Panel

5.1 The Review involves a detailed consideration of material by a Panel, comprising:

- At least two senior University of Southampton academics from outside the Faculty being reviewed (these should be an Associate Dean (Education) and a Faculty Director of Graduate School). One of these roles, usually the Associate Dean (Education), will act as Chair.
- An External Adviser, with knowledge and experience of PGR issues at another institution, and, where possible, with knowledge of some of the disciplines under review. The External Adviser should not have acted as an external examiner for the University of Southampton within the last five academic years.
- A Faculty Academic Registrar (not from the Faculty being reviewed).
- A member of the Quality, Standards and Accreditation Team (who will act as secretary)
- At least one PGR student from the University, but not from the Faculty being reviewed. A suggestion for this role should be sought from the SUSU PGR Academic Quality Officer.

5.2 To ensure a fair split of reviews amongst staff members, it would be preferable for the panel to be selected taking into account previous staff involvement in PGR Periodic Review Panels. See the 'PGR Periodic Review Panel membership' document in the Quality Handbook for the latest staff involvement in panels. The Faculty is responsible for identifying the panel, however, please refer to the Quality, Standards and Accreditation Team for assistance with identifying suitable internal candidates.

6. Appointing an External Adviser

6.1 In the first instance, the Faculty Director of the Graduate School may wish to contact the University's Director of the Doctoral College to identify an appropriate External Adviser.

6.2 The External Adviser should usually be someone in a senior position with responsibility for postgraduate research at another institution, ideally from a discipline area covered in the review. They should not have acted as an external examiner for a research programme at the University of Southampton within the last five academic years.

6.3 It would be usual practice for the External Adviser to be contacted informally to ascertain their willingness to serve in this role by the Faculty Director of the Graduate School. This should be followed up by a nomination of External Adviser form presented to the University's Director of the Doctoral College. Upon approval, the Faculty Director of the Graduate School will then then formally write to the External Adviser inviting them to undertake the role. A template letter is available from QSAT.

7. Payment for External Adviser:

7.1 A standard fee of £300 per day should be paid to the External Adviser in addition to any reasonable expenses.

8. Review Documentation

8.1 Before the review, the Faculty is asked to prepare a range of paperwork to demonstrate its compliance with the University's Regulations for Research Degrees and the Code of Practice for Research Candidature and Supervision. The panel should receive the documentation electronically three working weeks before the review. The documentation must include a reflective self-evaluation report considering the past five years where appropriate, and relevant supporting documentation. The following information should be provided, although faculties may wish to provide additional information, or samples of this type of information, where relevant:

8.1.1 A **reflective self-evaluation report**. Faculties should use the structure of the Code of Practice for Research Candidature and Supervision (headings extracted below) as a basic template for the report, and produce a thorough commentary on provision within the Faculty. Whilst commenting and reflecting on their provision, Faculties should also comment on: 1) where weaknesses exist within their provision; 2) areas the Faculty is working to improve; and 3) the enhancements achieved to date.

- o **The research environment** – suitability of the research environment; the interaction of students with peers to facilitate the existence of a research community; the suitability of research student's topics of research within research group settings; research student access to equipment and resources; the use of PGR Tracker; research student access to development opportunities; advice on career development
- o **Governance** – the research degree committee structure and governance within the Faculty; the Graduate School Office; the Faculty Graduate School directorate.
- o **The Admission and Selection of Research Students** – admission of research students in line with the Code of Practice for Research Candidature and Supervision; the application and transparency of selection procedures
- o **Research Training, Transferable Skills Training, and Professional Development** – suitability of training to reflect a research student's academic needs analysis; assessment of training needs throughout candidature; suitability of research skills training; use of training provided through the University's Doctoral College
- o **Ethical Considerations** – the availability of ethics training for research students; the existence of a formal channel to consider and determine ethical issues resulting from PGR programmes
- o **Supervision** – the quality of supervision; the membership of supervisory teams; whether supervisory teams understand and meet the responsibilities outlined in paragraph 40 of the Code of Practice for Research Candidature and Supervision; student perception on the quality of supervision; supervisory training; the quality of progress monitoring
- o **Progress Reviews and Confirmation** – the effectiveness of progress reviews; the effectiveness of the transfer/upgrade/confirmation assessments
- o **Thesis Submission** – any issues identified around the submission of the thesis; the circumstances in which any embargoed theses have been approved
- o **Examination** – any issues arising from examiners and/or student feedback on the examination process
- o **Student Feedback and Engagement** – the standard and quality of opportunities given to research students to engage with the Faculty to provide feedback on their experience as a research student
- o **Faculty Annual Monitoring** – progression rates; withdrawal rates; data on suspensions and extensions; and data on outcomes of final viva examinations.

8.1.2 **Annual Reports** on Research Degree Provision from the Faculty under review for the past five years

8.1.3 Relevant **committee information** relating to the governance of research degree provision in the Faculty

8.1.4   Sample **admissions forms** and details of the admissions process for research programmes

8.1.5   **Doctoral Programme Profiles** for all areas in the faculty

8.1.6   **Information about training and development opportunities** given to research students, including **induction programmes**

8.1.7   **Faculty results from the PRES**

8.1.8   **Evaluation results from PGR activities**

8.1.9   **Other relevant data** on the PGR student experience

8.1.10   **Data** on the **admission**, **progression**, **completion, withdrawal,** and **award** of PGRs in the past five years

8.1.11   The **Collaborative Provision**: Annual Reports on any collaborations related to PGR activity

8.1.12   **Sample minutes of SSLCs or equivalent**

8.1.13   Information and **handbooks for supervisory staff**

8.1.14   Information and **handbooks for PGR students**

8.1.15   Any **relevant Faculty policies** on PGR related activity, for example space allocation, supervisor workload allocation, etc.

8.2   This material will be sent to the Review Panel electronically at least three weeks in advance of the review meeting. The Panel may request additional information or clarification up to one week prior to the review.

8.3   The External Adviser will provide a written report at least one week before the event. This will allow other members of the Panel and the Faculty to identify lines of enquiry and prepare responses, giving the visit clearer focus.

8.4   Faculties must retain electronic copies of the material.

9. Review visit

9.1   Given the complexity of Faculty Graduate School structures and operations, the review visit should be scheduled for a whole day (at least), allowing sufficient time for discussions among the Panel and with Faculty PGR management, including administrative staff/the Faculty Director of the Graduate School/ Directors of the Doctoral Programmes (1.5 - 2 hours), students (1.5 - 2 hours), supervisors (1 – 1.5 hours).

9.2   Where applicable, the Panel may also wish to meet with alumni, graduates and industry partners.

9.3   An example timetable is provided below and could be used as a draft for the review day; the chair of the panel may wish, having read the documentation and consulted with other panel members, to adjust the timings of the day.

9.00 - 10.00	Private panel meeting to share initial impressions and key points arising from documentation
10.00 - 11.30	Meeting with: Graduate School directorate and Faculty Staff involved in the management of PGR (selectors, Directors of the Doctoral Programmes, etc…) Student and Academic Administration staff involved in PGR administration
11.30 - 12.45	Meeting with students (and alumni)
12.45 - 1.15	Lunch (for panel and all attendees of the review)

1:15 - 2.00	Private panel meeting to share views and identify issues of concern and/or good practice
2.00 - 3.00	Meeting with supervisors
3.00 - 3.30	Optional tour of faculty PGR facilities
3.30 - 4.15	Private panel meeting
4.15 - 5.00	Feedback to faculty

9.4 Meeting with the Graduate School directorate, Faculty Staff

9.4.1 In this meeting, the panel may to wish to explore:

- the alignment of postgraduate research activity with University and Faculty research strategy;
- practical arrangements for managing and monitoring student admission, progress and assessment;
- training and support for supervisors and examiners;
- the supervisor's role – concerns, good practice and support for enhancement;
- access to funding and other resources for research students;
- areas for development in relation to current research in the University and externally;
- the research environment and the integration of research students within it;
- anything else which the review panel or the supervisors wish to raise and which falls within the scope of the review.

9.5 Meeting with Students and Alumni

9.5.1 In the meeting with students, the Panel may wish to explore:

- pre-entry information and the application process;
- induction;
- research skills development (including generic and subject-specific provision);
- understanding of their programme of study and its requirements, including the skills developed;
- the quality of supervision and the options available to a student if the relationship with the supervisor breaks down;
- learning support materials and resources (including library, IT, use of Blackboard, PGR Tracker, handbooks, subject-specific resources such as labs);
- the assessment process – whether students understand what is required, are aware of the assessment criteria;
- support for students with particular problems – disabilities, English language problems, personal difficulties, etc;
- opportunities to give feedback individually or as a group including the role of student representatives;
- wider academic and social activities including postgraduate conferences and other opportunities to engage in the wider research activity of the subject area(s)/Faculty.

9.5.2 All efforts should be made to ensure that the Panel meets with a sample of at least six students covering all applicable modes of provision (full-time, part-time, distance learning) and types of programmes (MPhil, PhD) as applicable. Part-time students and those engaged in distance or collaborative learning may be consulted by email in advance of the review event and/or by video-conference prior to or during the review. The Faculty is responsible for identifying students to meet with the panel, however, the Student's Union Postgraduate (Research) Students Officer may be able to provide assistance with this.

9.6 Meeting with Supervisors

9.6.1 In the meeting with supervisors, the Panel may wish to explore:

- information and guidance for supervisors
- models of supervisor workload management
- training for supervisors (both new and established)
- supervisors' understanding of the University's Code of Practice for Research Candidature and Supervision

- support offered to students
- the research environment for students and supervisors
- supervisors' perceptions of the research student experience

9.6.2 All efforts should be made to ensure that the Panel meets with a sample of at least six supervisors covering, where possible, representatives from each School, and a range in terms of supervisory experience.

10. Reflection on the Review

10.1 To inform enhancements to the process, review panel members and Faculty members who took part in the review will complete a follow-up questionnaire which will look at:

- The scope of the review
- The reflective report
- The supporting documentation
- The review panel
- The review visit

10.2 The questionnaire is available in the Quality Handbook and will be distributed by QSAT following the review meeting.

11. Review Report

11.1 The final review report will be drafted by the secretary to the review panel and a draft version made available to the panel chair within two working weeks. Once reviewed by the chair, panel members will be able to comment on the draft. A suggested template for the report is available in the Quality Handbook, although not all sections of the report may be relevant in every review.

11.2 The chair and the secretary to the panel will work with the Faculty Director of the Graduate School to ensure the report contains no factual inaccuracies, before a final version of the report is produced.

11.3 The final review report may

- comment on the quality of the experience offered to postgraduate research students within the Faculty
- comment on the Faculty's compliance with the University's Code of Practice for Research Candidature and Supervision
- commend areas of good practice
- make recommendations on enhancements to the Faculty
- make recommendations to the University

11.4 The review report will be considered by the relevant School Programmes Committee, and at the PGR QME Subcommittee, which may make further requests to the Faculty on progress of any recommendations made.

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