**  
Senate**

**Subject: Postgraduate Research Degree Programme Reviews**

**Origin: Dean of the Graduate School**

**Executive Summary:** A proposal for a revised scheme, supported by the Research Committee, for Postgraduate Research Degree Programme Reviews.

**Action required**: To note, and comment on any issues considered to be of particular importance. To recommend to Senate that the following process is adopted across the University.

**Research Degree Programme Reviews: Proposal for 2011 onwards**

**Introduction**

In 2008 Senate established a programme of quality reviews of research degree programmes based on a three year cycle of visits to departments. The first cycle has now been completed.

This paper consists of a review of the process and a proposal for how the reviews should be conducted in future.

**Current practice**

The review panel consists of an ADR from a Faculty other than that being reviewed, a senior member the Research Student Office team and a representative of the Graduate School. Prior to the visit, documents are submitted by the Department and the Academic Registry and distributed to members of the department panel and the review panel. Full details of the required documentation can be found in appendix 1.

The review meeting takes approximately three hours. During this time the review panel meets the Head of Department, the research co-ordinator and any other relevant support staff, as requested by the HOD.

The department’s PGR programme is discussed under the following headings:

* Research Culture
* Admissions and Recruitment
* Progression
* Student Experience

The panel also meets up to six research students from a range of years, both UK/EU and international fee status. Members of the department panel are not present at this feedback session.

Following the visit, a report is written by the Graduate School administrator and approved by the members of the review panel. This report is sent to the HOD for comment, after which, the review and comments are sent to Research Committee and to the Faculty Directorate. The minutes of the Research Committee are then reported to Senate.

**Evaluation**

The review process supports departments and schools in providing a high quality PhD programme for all students and encourages departments to focus on continually improving standards. The review process has been light-touch but effective, and has been the basis for ongoing improvements in the quality of the PGR student experience.

The first round of reviews has shown PGR programmes throughout the University to be of a good standard. Generally, there is a high level of student satisfaction, four year submission rates are increasing, and many departments and schools have implemented changes in order to comply with the University regulations on joint supervision. Some however, still have issues with one or more of the following:

* Mechanisms for the representation of PGR students through SSLCs
* Meeting the requirements for a minimum number of formally recorded supervisory meetings
* Recruitment and admissions including meeting target numbers and student funding
* Progress review procedures including regularity and timeliness, feedback to students and uniform processes
* Meeting the requirement for each student to have more than one supervisor
* Unsatisfactory submission rates

It is hoped that these issues will be remedied as the new Schools finalise and implement their procedures. To date, there has been no opportunity to follow up on any specific recommendations made in the last round of reviews as it was envisaged that this would take place at the second round of reviews.

Following the implementation of the new University structure, there are key operational changes that will need to be made to the process from August 2011 onwards. The Graduate School aims to use this opportunity to build upon existing procedures, making the review process more consistent between schools and, where there are serious concerns, aiming to follow up on the review report recommendations within three months of the review.

**Future PGR programme reviews: Proposal**

The Graduate School now has overall responsibility for quality assurance of PGR provision. This is particularly significant in the light of the QAA Audit of the University which is expected in May 2012. The review process is a key component of the Graduate School’s role in providing university wide PGR degree programme quality assurance. As the School continues to take a more prominent role in both funding and quality audit of PGR programmes, a more formal and structured approach is proposed which will enable each School to identify its strengths and weaknesses.

It is proposed that from August 2011 PGR programme reviews are carried out at School level on a triennial cycle.

The proposed process is as follows:

At least one month before the agreed date of the review visit, a pre-visit pro forma (see appendix 2) will be sent to the School, together with student data from the Academic Registry. The pro-forma will be completed and returned, not less than one week before the visit. The Graduate School will then circulate the completed pro forma, any additional documents from the School and student data, to the review panel and to the School.

On the day of the review the PGR programme review panel will visit the School for approximately three hours. The panel will consist of:

* The Dean of the Graduate School, or nominee
* An ADR from another School (selected from pre-defined group of 3-4 ADRs who wish to be involved in the review process)
* A Research Student Office representative
* The Graduate School Administrative Officer

The panel will meet a committee from the School including:

* The Dean
* The ADR
* The Director of Research Degree Programmes (DORP)
* A member of staff who has supervisory responsibility (not being a probationer)
* The School PGR administrator

The visit will also include a meeting between the review panel and a group of students from a range of disciplines, years and fee statuses. No members of staff from the School will present during this part of the review.

During the visit, the panels will discuss the documentation provided and review the School’s PGR programme under the following general themes:

* Research Culture
* Admissions and Recruitment
* Progression
* Student Experience

Following the meeting, a report will be produced by the Graduate School (see appendix 3). This will then be sent to the Dean of the School for factual correction within one week of the review. The final report will be sent to the School within one month of the completion of the visit. The School will be required to respond to any recommendations within one month of receipt of the report, including an action plan for any issues which the review panel has identified as being in need of urgent attention.

The report, together with the School’s response, will be considered by the Research Committee and the outcome reported to Senate. Schools will need to develop their own internal procedures to manage the process.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Week** | **PGR review timeline** |
| -12 | Review date finalised and review pro forma sent to school |
| -4 | Graduate School sends Academic Registry data to School |
| -1 | School returns completed pro-forma and supporting documents to Graduate School. Documentation circulated to review panel. |
| 0 | REVIEW DATE |
| 1 | Draft report sent to Dean |
| 2 | Dean returns report to Graduate School with any factual corrections |
| 4 | Final report, with factual corrections sent from Graduate School to Dean |
| 8 | Final response sent from Dean to Graduate School (including any necessary actions proposed by the School) |
| 9-12 | Report and School’s response sent to Research Committee and Senate |

**Actions to be taken in the first instance:**

* Finalise new review procedure as detailed in this document
* Finalise the review pro-formas (pre-visit data request and report format)
* Determine which 3-4 ADRs are to be involved in the review process
* Determine review schedule for 2011-2012

**Appendix 1: Current PGR programme review pre-visit data request sheet**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Data (for the 3 academic years prior to the review)** | **Provider** |
| A commentary on its Research degree programmes highlighting the facilities and resources available to support the programmes (including IT, infrastructural support and research facilities); the maintenance and enhancement of quality and standards; particular achievements and plans for future development. | Department |
| Staff/Student Committee Notes | Department |
| Feedback from external bodies e.g. sponsors | Department |
| Provision of and Student Participation in Research Skills Training | Department |
| Research Student Handbooks | Department |
| Minutes of Research Student Progression Board or its equivalent. | Department |
| A commentary on joint supervision and why it is done and the role of the Supervisor and the Director of Research. | Department |
| Progress reports for any candidates admitted under special academic arrangements,eg English language waivers | Department |
| Admissions Statistics – Applications and Offers | Research Student Office |
| Student Intake Data and population data | Research Student Office |
| Research Student FTE per Supervisor | Research Student Office |
| Student Withdrawals | Research Student Office |
| 4 Year Research Degree Submission Rates | Research Student Office |
| Sources of Student Funding | Research Student Office |
| Number of Research Degree Supervisors | Research Student Office |
| Research Degrees Awarded | Research Student Office |
| Research Degree Outcomes e.g. referrals, fails | Research Student Office |
| Appeals Data | Research Student Office |

Available on the day: Student files including records of induction, annual progress review, supervisory meeting records, feedback to students, transferable skills training. **Appendix 2: PGR PROGRAMME REVIEW: School of ‘XYZ’**

|  |
| --- |
| ***SECTION A: Student data***  *This section will be completed by the Research Student Office and the data will be sent one month prior to the review.* |
| * Admissions Statistics – Applications and Offers * Student Intake Data * Population Data * Number of research degree supervisors and research student FTE per supervisor * Student Withdrawals * 4 Year Research Degree Submission Rates * Sources of Student Funding * Research Degrees Awarded * Research Degree Outcomes e.g. referrals, fails * Appeals Data |
| ***SECTION B: Commentary to be provided by school, one week prior to review***  *Please complete section A, providing 3-4 pages of relevant information on:* |
| **A) *Research Culture****: Include information on School research culture and structure, the role of the PhD student within the school, particular achievements of PGR students, a commentary on joint supervision and why it is done, the role of the Supervisor and the Director of Research and any other information you feel is relevant.* |
| **B) Admissions and Recruitment:** *Include a description of the school’s recruitment process, selection criteria, application turn-around times, interview policy, school induction programme and any other information you feel is relevant.* |
| **C) Progression:** *Include information on the maintenance and enhancement of quality and standards, methods employed to ensure submission within four years, frequency of meetings between students and supervisors and procedures used to document these meetings , progress reviews, progress reports, progression boards, provision of Research Skills Training and information on levels of student participation.* |
| **D) Student Experience:** *Include information on facilities and resources available to support PhD programmes, work space, IT, infrastructural support, conference and travel funds, research facilities, details of departmental seminars or conferences, social events and department community.* |
| **E) Plans for future development** |
| ***SECTION C: Supporting documents to be provided by the school, one week prior to review***  *Please send/attach the following documents, if available****:*** |
| 1. Student Handbook [ ] 2. Seminar series and/or departmental conference programme [ ] 3. Feedback from external collaborators or sponsors of PhD programmes [ ] 4. Staff/Student Committee Notes [ ] 5. Minutes of Research Student Progression Board or its equivalent [ ] 6. Progress reports for any candidates admitted under special academic arrangements, eg English language waivers [ ] |

**Appendix 3: PGR PROGRAMME REVIEW REPORT: DRAFT**

|  |
| --- |
| **School of ‘XYZ’: PGR Programme review 14th April 2012** |
| ***Graduate School Review Panel:***  Dean of Graduate School  ADR School of ‘ABC’  Research Student Office representative  Graduate School Administrative Officer  ***School Panel:***  The Dean  The ADR  The DORP  A member of staff who has supervisory responsibility (not a probationer)  School PGR administrator |
| **Introduction**  As part of the University’s response to the recommendations in the QAA Special Review of Research Degree programmes, Senate agreed to the introduction of reviews, at school level, on a similar basis to periodic programme reviews for taught programmes. The reviews involve a visit to the School to meet the Dean and a review panel, the production of PGR student data, a review of PGR student files and information and a commentary by the school on its practices. |
| **Executive Summary**  The School demonstrated a number of positive attributes with respect to its research degree programmes including:  The School should pay urgent attention to:  The School should look to address: |
| **Research Culture** |
| **Admissions and Recruitment** |
| **Progression** |
| **Student Experience** |
| **Student Feedback** |
| **Documentation** |
| **Conclusions** |

Author: S Marshall

Date: 10 May 2011