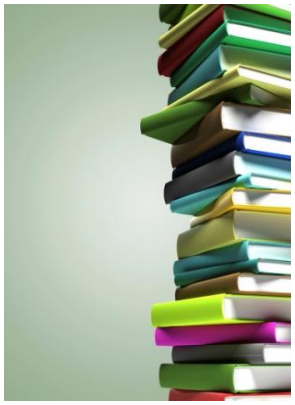

Guidance Notes for SUPERVISORS

Oct 2010

These notes are designed to act as an *aide memoire* for supervisors of research students. They are based on the Lancaster University *Code of Practice on Postgraduate Research Programmes*

CONTENTS

1 Registration
2 Induction of new research students by the department
3 Supervisory arrangements
4 Part-time teaching
5 The thesis
6 Progress files
7 Development Needs Analysis (DNA)
8 Research Training Programme (RTP)
9 Attendance monitoring
10 Monitoring student progress
11 Submission and completion
12 Examination
13 Complaints and appeals

Appendix. Responsibilities of supervisors and research students

1 Registration

All incoming research students intending to study for the degree of PhD are initially registered as probationary Ph.D candidates, with a requirement that their PhD candidature be confirmed by the Dean of Graduate Studies, following a recommendation from the student's progress panel.

2 Induction of new research students by the department

The Code of Practice (p.5)[1] states that "Departments are expected to provide all new research students with written information on:

- current research areas of all staff and students in the department;
- available facilities (e.g. office space; equipment/laboratories; computers; use of telephones, postage, and photocopiers; departmental transport; out-of-hours access, etc.);
- departmental personnel, procedures and services relevant to their study;
- details of the operation of the staff-student committee;
- the departmental procedures for reviewing progress and upgrading to Ph.D."

3 Supervisory arrangements

Each student should have at least one main supervisor, who will normally be part of a supervisory team (with appropriate expertise), and there must always be one clearly identified point of contact for the student.

The responsibilities of supervisors and research students, as defined in the Code of Practice, are listed in the Appendix to these Guidance Notes.

Supervisors and students must agree appropriate frequency and duration of supervisory meetings, although the Code of Practice (p.6) states that "a full-time student is entitled to at least an hour a fortnight with the supervisor(s) and a part-time student to at least an hour a month"

Students are responsible for keeping a record of important agreed outcomes of supervisory meetings, which they can do using the online Supervisory meetings record within *My*PGR (see section 6).

The Code of Practice (p.5) states that "The Head of Department or Postgraduate Tutor should also ensure that supervisors have the training and support they require to undertake effective supervision. This support might include recommending a supervisor to attend training courses, conferences, etc.; teaching relief or adjustment of other responsibilities. Probationary academic

[1] https://gap.lancs.ac.uk/ASQ/Policies/Pages/PGRCode.aspx

staff are usually required to take the Certificate in Academic Practice[2],which currently includes one-day workshops on supervision.

4 Part-time teaching

Many departments allow those research students who wish to, and who the department thinks suitable, to undertake paid part-time teaching. Such teaching ranges from demonstrating in practical classes, through leading tutorials and seminars, and in some cases to delivery of lectures. It is usually confined to teaching on undergraduate programmes.

Students should not normally be expected or required to teach for more than an average of 6 hours a week (averaged over the year), in order not to impede progress with their research degree.[3] Some departments take "teach" to mean contact time only, others include preparation and marking time.

Where research students are involved in marking work, the department must ensure that all such students are fully briefed and given appropriate marking schemes, and that all such marking is moderated in line with the University Regulations[4].

Research students who teach should have appropriate training beforehand. The Teaching & Curriculum Development team in OED offers a one-day Survival Skills workshop or a more substantial accredited programme for graduate teaching assistants, called Supporting Learning. Successful completion of this programme leads to the award of Certificate of Achievement in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education.[5]

5 The thesis

The University Postgraduate Regulations[6] specify what is required in the PhD – "The degree is awarded on the examination of a thesis embodying the results of a candidate's research, and on an oral examination. The nature of the student's research programme must be on a scale which can be completed during three years, or at most four years, of full-time study or equivalent. In addition the candidate may be required to undertake such other tests as the examiners may decide. A successful candidate for the degree of Ph.D. must show convincing evidence of the capacity to pursue scholarly research or scholarship in his or her field of study on a scale which can be completed during three years of full-time research. The results of this research must then be embodied in a thesis which makes an original contribution to knowledge and the completed thesis must contain material of a standard appropriate for scholarly publication. The thesis must comply with the requirements for the form, submission and deposit of theses."

The PhD is seen as a piece of work that a reasonably good research student should be able to complete within three years of full-time research. Projects should be designed accordingly.

The normal upper word limit for PhD theses is 80,000 words.

[2] http://www.lancs.ac.uk/celt/celtweb/certificate_for_staff
[3] http://www.lancs.ac.uk/celt/celtweb/cop_employment_PG
[4] https://gap.lancs.ac.uk/ASQ/QAE/MARP/Pages/default.aspx (see section D5)
[5] http://www.lancs.ac.uk/celt/celtweb/atp
[6] https://gap.lancs.ac.uk/ASQ/QAE/MARP/Pages/default.aspx

6 Progress files

Research students are expected to keep and regularly update a progress File (formerly known as the Personal Development Plan, or PDP) in which they maintain a record of the activities they undertake, along with their reflections and commentary on their personal development.

The University has developed a purpose-built online Progress File called *My*PGR[7] for research students to use. This tool is designed to ease the burden on students and supervisors by providing a structured space in which the student is guided through a series of self-reflection tasks, and in which they can record their thoughts and experiences. *My*PGR and its contents are confidential to the student; no-one else can see what they write, unless they grant access to it or print it out to show to someone else. It also provides an online space to record the outcomes of supervisory meetings.

Research students who do not wish to use the online Progress File should be advised to at least complete the Development Needs Analysis section within *My*PGR and print it out so that they can discuss it with their supervisors. They should also be encouraged to use some other appropriate format of Progress File.

The Progress File record, in whatever format it is kept, will be invaluable to research students when they draft CVs, seek jobs or need to describe and evidence their personal development and competencies.

7 Development Needs Analysis (DNA)

In line with the University's progression requirements[8] all Research students are expected to carry out a Development Needs Analysis (DNA) in order to reflect on what generic skills and competencies they have, will need, and would like. The DNA will allow them to monitor their own progress against their target.

The university has developed a formal DNA tool within *My*PGR for research students. It allows the student to decide how good they think they are at a particular set of skills or competencies.

Research students are expected to carry out an initial DNA using the material in *My*PGR soon after they arrive. When completed, they should then allow their Supervisor online access to it or print this out and show it to their supervisor(s); a discussion based on the DNA print-out should inform decisions about what skills development and research training activities would be most appropriate for that student in that particular year.

The student should then repeat their DNA at the start of each subsequent year, using the same online tool. The results will be useful in two ways – helping the student to appreciate what progress they have made in developing particular skills, and informing decisions about what further training and development activities would be most appropriate for them personally.

The DNA is informed by the Joint Research Councils' *Skills Training Requirements for Research Students*[9] which covers seven broad areas – research skills & techniques; research environment; research management; personal effectiveness; communication skills; networking and team-working; and career management.

[7] https://myplace.lancs.ac.uk/mypgr.nsf
[8] https://gap.lancs.ac.uk/ASQ/QAE/MARP/Pages/default.aspx (see section C7.4)
[9] http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/cmsweb/downloads/rcuk/researchcareers/jsstrainingrequirements.pdf

8 Research Training Programme (RTP)

Full-time research students are expected to spend 10 days each year on activities related to developing their skills and competencies, and to their personal development. Part-time students are expected to spend around half this time. Accreditation can be given for appropriate prior learning, at the discretion of the supervisor.

Students will find *My*PGR useful in planning these activities (using the DNA), in logging what they have actually done, and in recording their reflections on the activities they have undertaken.

Each faculty runs its own Research Training Programme, which includes discipline-specific activities as well as a broader range of generic skills based activities. Each faculty has an RTP Director who co-ordinates the faculty programme. Faculty research training webpages are a good place to start to find out further information about what is on offer in each Faculty.

9 Attendance monitoring

In May 2009 the Senate approved procedures for the attendance monitoring of students. The approved procedure for PGR students is:

- In keeping with our regulations for research students, supervisors and student should agree at least one fortnightly interaction – whether by email, face to face contact, submission of a draft chapter etc. For part-time research students, a monthly interaction should be agreed.
- This programme of interaction must be written.
- Supervisors must keep records of substantive interactions with students.
- In the event of no contact at eight (successive) expected interactions, supervisors should notify the Student Registry.

10 Monitoring student progress

Monitoring of student progress helps us to identify those who are struggling (for whatever reasons) and offer appropriate help and guidance.

Informal monitoring takes place partly through the regular meetings students should be having with supervisors. If you have any concerns about the pace at which your student is making progress, please draw it to the attention of your Department Postgraduate Director of Studies.

Departments are required to submit an annual progress report on each of their research students. Supervisor and student complete sections of the report, and both should see what the other has written. Whilst none of us wants to put a student under pressure, it is very important that these annual progress reports are factually correct and give an honest assessment of progress made; it is not unusual, if a student subsequently runs into problems, for annual progress reports to paint an inappropriately rosy picture when in retrospect it is clear that they were struggling in some way. It is not a kindness to the student to mislead them into thinking all is well when deep down inside you think otherwise.

The completed report should be forwarded before the deadline date to the Student Registry, where its receipt is formally logged and added to the student's file.

In February 2008 the Senate agreed that all research students must, within their first year (first 2 years for part-time) -

1. attend the approved induction programme;
2. carry out the approved development needs analysis (DNA) in

consultation with their supervisors, and keep a record of agreed follow-up to the DNA;
3. take the appropriate research training activities, informed by the DNA and guided by their supervisors;
4. complete a research proposal or plan of work which the supervisors approve as appropriate and viable; and
5. agree a projected completion timetable with their supervisors.

These requirements, as well as the academic quality of the student's work and progress over the year, should inform the confirmation/transfer panel's decision on whether or not to confirm PhD registration or confirm upgrade to PhD. In line with the University regulations (section C7.4.9 of MARP) students who are not transferred/confirmed as PhD on the first attempt should be given a second opportunity at transfer/confirmation.

Where research students do not have a confirmation (previously upgrade) panel in year 1, an annual appraisal (progress) meeting must be held and the annual appraisal (progress) report must be submitted to the Student Registry.

Senate agreed that continued registration of each research student in years 2, 3 and 4 is conditional upon –

i. submission of an annual appraisal (progress) report, involving input from the student, supervisors and department;
ii. evidence, confirmed in the annual (appraisal) progress report, that the student has –
    a. made sufficient progress with their research/thesis;
    b. been offered adequate supervision (as outlined in the University's Code of Practice for Research students), accepted it, and attended supervisory sessions;
    c. completed the agreed research training;
    d. agreed a realistic completion timetable with their supervisors;
    e. attended the annual faculty-based progress briefing session; and
    f. reviewed/revised their DNA.

Where students fail to meet the criteria for continued registration, they will be excluded.

Each student must agree a realistic completion timetable with their supervisors, review/revise it each year, and evidence this at confirmation and in annual appraisal (progress) reports, flagging any reasons for concern and noting what remedial action is being taken.

At 30 months into a student's registration (full-time, pro rata for part-time), research students who have not yet submitted must have a formal (minuted) meeting at six monthly intervals with their supervisors and the department's Director of Studies for research students, to review progress against expected submission date, agree remedial action as appropriate, and report to Faculty Associate Dean and the Student Registry.

A research student who has not been recommended for upgrade, or confirmed for PhD, has the right of appeal.[10]

11 Submission and completion

The normal minimum period of registration for PhD research students is 36 months full-time, 48 months part-time. This can exceptionally be reduced by up

[10] https://gap.lancs.ac.uk/ASQ/QAE/MARP/Pages/default.aspx (see section C7.4)

to 6 months for both full-time and part-time students (with fees adjusted accordingly), with the support of the supervisors and the prior approval of the Dean of Graduate Studies.

The normal maximum period of registration for PhD research students is 48 months full-time, 72 months part-time; for MPhil students it is 36 and 60 months. Extensions beyond the maximum will only be allowed in exceptional circumstances and if approved in advance by the Student Registry.

Requests for intercalations and extensions will only be approved if they meet agreed criteria, are supported by appropriate evidence, and are formally submitted in advance.

The decision when to submit a thesis for examination is the student's, but it should be informed by the views of the supervisors.

11 Examination

The viva remains the standard way of examining research degrees, and this involves an internal and at least one external examiner. Full details of the procedures can be found in the document *Examination of Research Degrees: guidance notes*.[11]

One of the responsibilities of supervisors is to help their research students to prepare for their viva, and one useful way of doing this is to hold a mock viva which is formal, searching and structured in the same way as a real viva.

All vivas must have either an Independent Chair or audio record, details of which must be included on the *Appointment of Examiners* form.[12]

11 Complaints and appeals

Sections within the Manual of Academic Regulations and Procedures[13] outline the formal procedures that must be followed in dealing with complaints and appeals by research students.

[11] http://www.lancs.ac.uk/sbs/registry/docs/ExternalExaminers/guidance-notes-research-degrees.pdf
[12] http://www.lancs.ac.uk/sbs/registry/examiners/index.htm
[13] https://gap.lancs.ac.uk/ASQ/QAE/MARP/Pages/default.aspx

Appendix. Responsibilities of supervisors and research students (from the Lancaster Code of Practice)

Supervisors

"The supervisor(s) is expected to:

- explore fully the student's background at the outset, and identify areas where further training (including language training) is needed;
- give guidance on: the nature of research and the standard expected; the planning of the research programme; attendance at appropriate courses; literature and sources; laboratory techniques; sources of information on intellectual property rights.
- be aware of the particular difficulties faced by many overseas students, who may initially need very frequent contact and advice on facilities, training courses, language tuition, etc.;
- check on the student's progress at regular intervals;
- allocate a reasonable period of time for supervisory sessions: a full-time student is entitled to at least an hour a fortnight with the supervisor(s) and a part-time student to at least an hour a month. Supervisors should ensure that as far as possible supervision sessions are uninterrupted by telephone calls, personal callers or departmental business;
- deal with urgent problems as soon as possible, either over the telephone, via e-mail, or through a meeting arranged at short notice;
- read and provide constructive comments on any work submitted by the student within a reasonable time period;
- ensure that the student is made aware if either progress or the standard of work is unsatisfactory, and arrange any necessary supportive action. If the lack of progress is due to a personal problem a suspension of registration may be appropriate, and this possibility should be discussed with the student;
- carry out an annual review of the student;
- take steps to ensure that the student is given proper guidance on the use of specialist equipment and techniques;
- take an active part in introducing the student to meetings of learned societies, seminars and workshops and to other research workers in the field, and give advice on writing up the research for publication;
- put the student in touch with specialists inside or outside the University if the student's work goes significantly outside the supervisor's field;
- inform the student of any periods of absence

Research students

"The student is expected to:

- tackle the research with a positive commitment, taking full advantage of the resources and facilities offered by the academic environment and in particular contact with the supervisor, other staff and research students;
- discuss with the supervisor the type of guidance and comment believed to be most helpful, the training which might be required, and agree a schedule of meetings;
- attend supervision sessions, meetings, seminars, lectures and laboratory sessions as required by the supervisor or Head of Department;
- aim, by the end of the first year (or 2 years for part-time students), as well as having completed a broad programme of relevant work and training, to have defined the area of research, become acquainted with the background knowledge required and the relevant literature, and have a framework for the future progress of the research with a timetable for the next 2 or 3 years (3 or 4 years in the case of part-time students;
- maintain the progress of the work in accordance with the stages agreed with the supervisor, and take note of the guidance and feedback from the supervisor;
- agree with the supervisor(s) any periods of absence from the University;
- take responsibility for seeking out the supervisor;
- discuss any problems, such as those of access, or conflicting advice, with the supervisor(s) at the time - early discussion and resolution of problems can prevent difficulties later on. (If the student feels unable to raise the problem with the supervisor(s), he or she should discuss the difficulty with a senior member of the department - normally the Head of Department or Postgraduate Tutor.
- decide when to submit the thesis, taking account of University regulations on minimum and maximum periods for

from the University, so that the student can plan accordingly;

- make supervision arrangements for students whose normal place of research is somewhere other than Lancaster, and liaise with any external supervisors."

submission, and the supervisor's opinion."