

**Lancaster University
Graduate School**

Lancaster University Code of Practice on Postgraduate Research Programmes

This Code of Practice outlines the framework for postgraduate research students at Lancaster. It is informed by and aligned with the revised QAA Code of Practice on Postgraduate Research Programmes (Sept 2004), was approved by the Senate on 25 May 2005, replaces the 1999 Lancaster University Code of Practice for Research Students, and is effective from 1 October 2005.

Under each major theme, the general principle (precept) of the QAA Code of Practice is shown in *italic* in a box, and beneath that is the text of the Lancaster University Code of Practice.

INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

QAA COP precept 1. Institutions will put in place effective arrangements to maintain appropriate academic standards and enhance the quality of postgraduate research programmes.

Although the student's everyday dealing will be with their departments, it is necessary to bear in mind that ultimately it is the University which bears responsibility for:

- maintaining the Regulations for Postgraduate Students;
- admitting students and ensuring that admissions standards are maintained;
- checking that departments are monitoring students and dealing with complaints and problems;
- approving recommendations for upgrading students from M.Phil. to Ph.D.;
- appointing examiners;
- recording the submission date of theses and sending them to the examiners;
- approving examiners' recommendations and awarding degrees;
- handling reviews and appeals;
- maintaining an overview of all postgraduate activities.

The University fulfils these responsibilities through the activities of the Graduate School Director, the Graduate School Committee, faculty and departmental postgraduate committees, the Student Registry, the Teaching Quality Support Office, and the Postgraduate Admissions Office.

The operation and effectiveness of these systems is monitored at departmental level in three ways. The director of postgraduate research students in each department is expected to appraise the progress of all research students; doctoral directors will provide a summary report annually to the Faculty Postgraduate Committee. Faculty Associate Deans for Postgraduate Students have the authority to undertake a spot-audit of this annual appraisal cycle in any of their departments. Departmental procedures for dealing with research students are also monitored through the university's Periodic Quality Review process.

QAA COP precept 2. Institutional regulations for postgraduate research degree programmes will be clear and readily available to students and staff. Where appropriate, regulations will be supplemented by similarly accessible, subject-specific guidance at the level of the faculty, school or department.

Lancaster's Regulations for Postgraduate Research Degree Programmes are contained in the Postgraduate Handbook, a printed copy of which is issued to each new research student on

registration. Additional printed copies are available from the Student Registry, and the Regulations are also available online (<http://www.lancs.ac.uk/users/gradschool/regulations.html>).

QAA COP precept 3. Institutions will develop, implement and keep under review a code or codes of practice applicable across the institution, which include(s) the areas covered by this document. The code(s) should be readily available to all students and staff involved in postgraduate research programmes.

This Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Students is contained in the University's Postgraduate Handbook, a printed copy of which is issued to each new research student on registration, and to each supervisor annually. Additional printed copies are available from the Student Registry, and the Code is also available online (<http://www.lancs.ac.uk/users/gradschool/code%20-%20research%20students.html>). This Code will be reviewed no later than October 2010.

QAA COP precept 4. Institutions will monitor the success of their postgraduate research programmes against appropriate internal and/or external indicators and targets.

The Graduate School Committee annually reviews overall and departmental submission rates, and return rates of research student progress review forms from departments.

The University will adopt and use the Key Performance Indicators accepted by HEFCE, the QAA and the Research Councils as a basis for benchmarking and performance measurement, both internally and across the sector.

THE RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

QAA COP precept 5. Institutions will only accept research students into an environment that provides support for doing and learning about research and where high quality research is occurring.

High quality research is the norm in every academic department at Lancaster, all supervisors are research-active, and the University has a long-established and successful environment that provides support for doing and learning about research, evidenced by its relatively high completion rates.

The detailed requirement for a programme of work frequently cannot be specified in advance but the department is required to ensure that, in so far as can be predicted, the necessary resources (e.g. library, computing and laboratory facilities, and technical assistance) will be available. Supervisors should be active in research, with a knowledge of the student's research area and/or the theoretical approach to be applied.

SELECTION, ADMISSION AND INDUCTION OF STUDENTS

QAA COP precept 6. Admissions procedures will be clear, consistently applied and will demonstrate equality of opportunity.

Students are admitted by the University on the recommendation of the Head of Department or nominee. The proposed supervisor(s) should be specified.

Application for research degrees is by individual application to Lancaster University. The application form is available on paper, downloadable via MSWord or PDF formats from the University's web site, or online (from summer 2005). Applications should be accompanied by additional

documentation (research proposal / abstract, two academic references, transcripts of previous higher education studies, evidence of English language proficiency for students whose first language is not English) and must be forwarded to the University's central postgraduate admissions office for initial logging and checking. All applications for research within the University's subject domains are forwarded to the relevant academic department or centre for review by the department's director of research students or similar. Normally, the director will consult one or more colleagues before making a decision on a candidate. This decision takes the form of a recommendation to the Postgraduate Admissions Officer, who will review the decision and issue the appropriate letter to the applicant (normally a formal offer of admission or a rejection). In certain circumstances, principally where the department is unable to obtain sufficient additional information on an applicant to make a decision, an application is deemed to have lapsed.

Full details of how to apply are given in the Postgraduate Prospectus (printed and online versions) and on the online postgraduate application pages of the University's web site.

QAA COP precept 7. Only appropriately qualified and prepared students will be admitted to research programmes.

Candidates for research degrees must be good honours degree graduates of a recognised university in the UK or comparable university overseas, or persons with equivalent qualifications who show evidence of exceptional ability, or who have demonstrated their ability in graduate studies.

The department, in consultation with the Postgraduate Admissions Officer, or her/his deputy, is required to ensure that the candidate is appropriately qualified for the proposed programme of work, including language ability for students whose first language is not English.

Details of academic entry requirements and English Language proficiency are contained in the Postgraduate Prospectus (printed and online versions).

QAA COP precept 8. Admissions decisions will involve at least two members of the institution's staff who will have received instruction, advice and guidance in respect of selection and admissions procedures. The decision-making process will enable the institution to assure itself that balanced and independent admissions decisions have been made, that support its admissions policy.

All admission decisions involve at least two members of staff of the University, including (at least one of) the prospective Head of Department (or nominee) and supervisor, and a senior member of the Postgraduate Admissions Office.

The admissions process is described in a detailed operational manual produced by the Postgraduate Admissions Officer and issued to academic and administrative staff involved in the admission of postgraduate research students. This document links directly to key precepts and policies described in the University's Academic Procedures Manual as well as to the University's Rules and Regulations.

The Postgraduate Admissions Office provides detailed advice and guidance to academic selectors and supervisors on all aspects of the selection and admissions process including:

- equal opportunities
- ensuring fair and consistent decision-making
- checking applicants' qualifications against entry criteria (including comparability of international qualifications and English language proficiency issues) and advising on non-standard entry (e.g. candidates who do not possess the level of qualifications outlined in the

- entry criteria but who may be eligible on the basis of professional training and/or relevant work experience)
- funding opportunities (external and internal funding competitions and awards).

QAA COP precept 9. The entitlements and responsibilities of a research student undertaking a postgraduate research programme will be defined and communicated clearly.

Each research student is entitled to receive an appropriate amount and type of supervision (to give them a realistic prospect of successful completion), to expect an appropriate research environment in which to work (including access to training opportunities, seminars and academic discussions), and to have access to appropriate facilities (the precise nature of which will vary from department to department, and will normally be defined in the Departmental Research Student Handbook).

Departments are expected to make every effort to ensure that students have a place to work, along with adequate facilities for them to carry out their work effectively. Special arrangements must be made where equipment breakdown or a shortage of specialised equipment causes delay to the student, and the Department should attempt to minimise such disruption.

Research students also have responsibilities. 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. If for any reason this is not felt to be possible, the student should contact the Director of the University Graduate School, via the Student Registry)
- decide when to submit the thesis, taking account of University regulations on minimum and maximum periods for submission, and the supervisor's opinion.

QAA COP precept 10. Institutions will provide research students with sufficient information to enable them to begin their studies with an understanding of the academic and social environment in which they will be working.

The University and Faculties provide an induction programme for all new research students, which includes orientation information and details of relevant University procedures and personnel, and is

designed to clarify expectations on such things as submission time, quality of research, support available to students, and amount and type of supervision.

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.

SUPERVISION

QAA COP precept 11. Institutions will appoint supervisors who have the appropriate skills and subject knowledge to support, encourage and monitor research students effectively.

Supervisors should be active in research, with a knowledge of the student's research area and/or the theoretical approach to be applied. Supervisors should hold an academic qualification at least at a level equivalent to that for which the student is registered, or should have considerable experience of research at doctoral level. Members of staff on probation (i.e. with less than two years' experience) should not normally be appointed as a student's sole supervisor, though they might, in the interest of staff training and development, be appointed as a joint supervisor with a more experienced colleague.

The department is expected to ensure that proper supervision can be provided and maintained during any periods of study leave or absence by supervisor(s), or time spent abroad by the student. The University, with assistance from the department, will take steps to safeguard appropriate provision (including, where necessary, providing help in exploring the transfer of the student to another institution) in the event of the supervisor(s) leaving the University and there being no other appropriate supervisor readily available.

If difficulties with the supervisor cannot be resolved, the student may ask the Head of Department (or other appropriate senior member of staff) for a change of supervisor. If the situation cannot be resolved, the department is expected within reasonable limits to provide an appropriate alternative source of supervision.

The Head of Department/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.

The Head of Department should discuss complaints about supervision with the supervisor, and where appropriate, recommend training, or appoint an additional supervisor. In some cases it may be necessary to find an alternative supervisor. If the supervisor is the Head of Department, an appropriate senior member of staff should take this responsibility.

QAA COP precept 12. Each research student will have a minimum of one main supervisor. He or she will normally be part of a supervisory team. There must always be one clearly identified point of contact for the student.

Each research student will have a minimum of one main supervisor, who will normally be part of a supervisory team. There must always be one clearly identified point of contact for the student, which will normally be the main supervisor. The main supervisor will have primary responsibility for the student. The department must take into account when registering students the need to create a supervisory team with appropriate expertise (although not all members need to be subject specialists) and the need for an internal examiner (who does not need to be a member of the same department).

QAA COP precept 13. Institutions will ensure that the responsibilities of all research student supervisors are clearly communicated to supervisors and students through written guidance.

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:
 - o the nature of research and the standard expected;
 - o the planning of the research programme;
 - o attendance at appropriate courses;
 - o literature and sources;
 - o laboratory techniques;
 - o 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 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.

QAA COP precept 14. Institutions will ensure that the quality of supervision is not put at risk as a result of an excessive volume and range of responsibilities assigned to individual supervisors.

Supervisors should not be responsible for more research students than can adequately and equitably be supervised. That number will depend on the supervisor's overall workload and other commitments, but faculties are expected to ensure that the workload allocation model that operates within their constituent departments takes into account the number and type of research students that a supervisor has responsibility for, in a consistent and transparent way.

PROGRESS AND REVIEW ARRANGEMENTS

QAA COP precept 15. Institutions will put in place and bring to the attention of students and relevant staff clearly defined mechanisms for monitoring and supporting student progress.

QAA COP precept 16. Institutions will put in place and bring to the attention of students and relevant staff clearly defined mechanisms for formal reviews of student progress, including explicit review stages.

If the research area has not been agreed prior to admission, it should be established as soon as possible after admission, following consultation between the student and the proposed supervisor(s). The supervisor(s) and student have a joint responsibility to ensure that delay in determining the topic is kept to a minimum.

Departments are responsible for carrying out an assessment of students' progress at least annually. The assessment should include a recommendation as to whether the student should be allowed to continue. The student should be told about the outcome of the assessment. If progress or the standard of work is considered below that generally expected, the student should be given positive feedback on how matters might be improved. If the progress continues to be unsatisfactory, the student should be given a written warning that unless certain targets are achieved satisfactorily by a specified date the student will be referred to the Standing Academic Committee with a recommendation that the student's registration be terminated.

QAA COP precept 17. Institutions will provide guidance to students, supervisors and others involved in progress monitoring and review processes about the importance of keeping appropriate records of the outcomes of meetings and related activities.

The department is expected to keep a record for each research student that is adequate to demonstrate that regular appropriate supervision and guidance are being given by supervisors.

The University will make accessible to each research student online Personal Development Planning (PDP) software on which they will be expected to record agreed outcomes of discussions with their supervisors (including key decisions). Students will be expected to draft the text, and supervisors will be expected to validate it. The PDP includes material that is confidential to the student and material that is accessible to supervisors, to add to the departmental record. Monitoring that an appropriate record of agreed outcomes is being kept will be part of the student's annual review of progress, on which both the supervisor and student must comment in writing.

The Student Registry will advise new research students, and remind supervisors annually, of the need to keep appropriate records of the outcomes of meetings and related activities.

DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCH AND OTHER SKILLS

QAA COP precept 18. Institutions will provide research students with appropriate opportunities for personal and professional development.

The university provides a range of opportunities for research students to engage in personal and professional development, which includes both formal and informal activities, and covers both discipline-specific research training and generic skills development. All research students are expected to engage with an appropriate selection of these, chosen in consultation with their supervisor.

Each full-time research student is expected to undertake an average of two weeks of training and development for each year they are registered.

Departments are expected to encourage students to present their work at staff and graduate seminars.

If research students are given teaching duties, the Department is expected to require them to undertake appropriate training, and to give them adequate instruction in the use of teaching equipment.

Departments must ensure that all students are aware of safe operational procedures when using specialised equipment and techniques.

QAA COP precept 19. Each student's development needs will be identified and agreed jointly by the student and appropriate academic staff, initially during the student's induction period; they will be regularly reviewed during the research programme and amended as appropriate.

Departments are expected to ensure that each student's development needs (including research training, discipline-specific training, and broader generic skills) are identified and agreed jointly by the student and supervisor, initially during the student's induction period. The student's development needs will be reviewed at least annually during the research programme (as part of the annual review process), and amended as appropriate.

Each research student will be expected to have completed appropriate training and development activities as a condition of being upgraded from MPhil to PhD registration.

QAA COP precept 20. Institutions will provide opportunities for research students to maintain a record of personal progress, which includes reference to the development of research and other skills.

The University will make accessible to each research student online Personal Development Planning (PDP) software, on which they will be expected to maintain a record of their personal progress, including reference to the development of their research and generic skills.

FEEDBACK MECHANISMS

QAA COP precept 21. Institutions will put in place mechanisms to collect, review and, where appropriate, respond to feedback from all concerned with postgraduate research programmes. They will make arrangements for feedback to be considered openly and constructively and for the results to be communicated appropriately.

The University receives feedback from those involved with postgraduate research programmes in a variety of ways. Formal routes include the annual review process (student and supervisor), through research student representation on department, faculty and university committees, and through the university's routine quality assurance processes, particularly Periodic Quality Review (which includes a meeting with research students in the department). Informal routes include close working relationships with the Graduate Student Association (GSA) and the Lancaster University Students' Union (LUSU), and through the network of staff engaged in research training and skills development. From time to time, this formal and informal is supplemented by special surveys of research student views, collected by the GSA, LUSU or other university service providers (including the Library and the Careers Service). The university's complaints and appeals procedures, and the LUSU Advice Centre also provide useful feedback.

The Graduate School Committee has formal responsibility for considering these sources of feedback openly and constructively, and for appropriate communication of the results. LUSU and the GSA are also responsible for considering student feedback and for pursuing generic issues in appropriate ways.

ASSESSMENT

QAA COP precept 22. Institutions will use criteria for assessing research degrees that enable them to define the academic standards of different research programmes and the achievements of their graduates. The criteria used to assess research degrees must be clear and readily available to students, staff and external examiners.

The Postgraduate Regulations (printed version, and online at <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/users/gradschool/regulations.html>) define the criteria for the award of research degrees (MPhil and doctorate).

QAA COP precept 23. Research degree assessment procedures must be clear; they must be operated rigorously, fairly, and consistently; include input from an external examiner; and carried out to a reasonable timescale.
QAA COP precept 24. Institutions will communicate their assessment procedures clearly to all the parties involved, ie the students, the supervisor(s) and the examiners.

The Postgraduate Regulations (printed version, and online at <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/users/gradschool/regulations.html>) define the assessment procedures for the award of research degrees (MPhil and doctorate), which are operated rigorously, fairly and consistently, include input from at least one external examiner, and are carried out to a reasonable timescale.

STUDENT REPRESENTATIONS

QAA COP precept 25. Institutions will put in place and publicise procedures for dealing with student representations that are fair, clear to all concerned, robust and applied consistently. Such procedures will allow all students access to relevant information and an opportunity to present their case.

The views of research students are sought and represented within the university in a variety of ways, including through research student representatives on departmental staff: student committees, and on department and faculty postgraduate committees. Elected officers of the Graduate Student Association (GSA) represent research student views on many university committees, including

Graduate School Committee and the Senate. The Lancaster University Students Union (LUSU) also has elected postgraduate student members on its Academic Council. LUSU oversees the election, appointment, training, induction and operation of the student representative system (<http://www.lusu.co.uk/postgrad>).

COMPLAINTS

QAA COP precept 26. Independent and formal procedures will exist to resolve effectively complaints from research students about the quality of the institution's learning and support provision.

The University's formal procedures for dealing with student complaints, including those made by research students, are defined in the Student Charter, which is available in printed format from the Student Registry, and online via the Graduate School web site (<http://www.lancs.ac.uk/users/gradschool/complain.html>).

APPEALS

QAA COP precept 27. Institutions will put in place formal procedures to deal with any appeals made by research students. The acceptable grounds for appeals will be clearly defined.

The University's formal procedures for dealing with appeals made by research students (which includes the Postgraduate Review Panel and students' right of appeals under Statute 21), are defined in the Postgraduate Regulations, a copy of which is issued to each incoming research student. Printed copies are also available from the Student Registry, and an online version can be found on the Graduate School web site (<http://www.lancs.ac.uk/users/gradschool/regulations%20-%20special.html>). Appeals can be made on procedural grounds, but appeals against academic judgements are not permissible.

Chris Park
Graduate School Director
29 April 2005

[Revised version 31 May 2005 incorporating comments made by the Senate on 25 May 2005]