

RESEARCH DEGREE PROGRAMMES PERIODIC REVIEW GUIDANCE FOR PANEL MEMBERS

Periodic Review normally takes place every six years and, in respect of Research Degree Programmes, takes place in a centrally arranged University-wide event. The scope¹ of the review encompasses all research degree programmes including: Postgraduate Research Degree Programmes (RDP) MPhil/PhD across the University, Professional Doctorate, Integrated Doctorate, Collaborative, and Flexible and Distributed Learning (FDL), undertaken by fulltime, part-time, overseas and home students. It should be noted, however, that individual Professional Doctorate programmes' taught curriculum (Stage 2 Part 1) is considered within the relevant local taught programmes Periodic Programme Review.

The review provides for confirmation (or otherwise) of:

- Appropriate Academic Standards
- Appropriate Quality of Learning Opportunities
- Effective annual monitoring and review processes

The guiding principles for these outcomes are as defined in the Indicators of the QAA UK Quality Code Chapter B11 and the University of Portsmouth's Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes 2013.

As part of the review process, the panel that you are a member of (consisting of internal university staff and two external assessor(s)) receives documentation and has the opportunity to discuss the provision with relevant stakeholders. Based upon the evidence received, the panel will confirm (or otherwise) the above outcomes. The panel's findings, including the identification of key strengths and any recommendations for further development and/or consideration, will be communicated in a report that is considered at Faculty level by Faculty Research Degrees Committees and Faculty Executive Committees, and at University level by the Quality Assurance Committee and the University Research Degrees Committee.

The following guidance sets out a number of areas that the panel might wish to explore. These are offered with a view to providing a basis for systematic judgment and to support consistency of practice but are not intended to be wholly comprehensive or over-prescriptive. The review also aims to allow for collegiate discussion between the panel and RDP stakeholders on best practice and potential enhancements.

On receipt of the documentation:

Is it complete?

The Programme Monitoring and Review Operational Handbook identifies the documentation that should be available to panel members for this event as:

¹ Taught programmes such as MRes, MSc/PgCert Research Methods are not included in the scope for this event as they are subject to Periodic Programme Review within the taught programme schedule

- RDP Academic Regulations – various formats (*PhD hard copy and on-line availability for the rest*)
- RDP Periodic Review Commentary (*event specific document*)
- Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes 2013
- Supervisor Handbook 2013
- Student Handbook 2013
- Faculty Research Degree Coordinator Annual Standards & Quality Evaluative Review (ASQER) reports (*5 Faculties*) (*most recent*)
- Director of the Graduate School paper to Academic Policy and Quality Group (APQG) (*2 years*)
- Graduate School Performance Indicators
- Completion and Award Data (University and Faculty breakdowns and Professional Doctorate comparison)
- Student Feedback summary
2011 PRES – Action Plan/Update/Completion/Commentary
2013 PRES – Action Plan – and update as appropriate
- Programme Specification for Professional Doctorates (*examples: 1 from Health and 1 from ICJS*)
- QAA Audit/Review sections that refer to RDPs and any follow up actions (*as appropriate*)
- Training and Development:
For example:
Graduate School Induction/research training/numbers completing
Supervisors/Students
GProf (*on line link*)
(*Skills Forge/Epigeum – information in Commentary*)
- Collaborative & Flexible and Distributed Learning with a Partner list

If there is anything missing without explanation or if, exceptionally, you believe it would be helpful to have additional information to that listed, please contact the Quality Management Division of Academic Registry (023 92 843402).

Is it on time?

The documentation should be available to you three weeks prior to the review event. The administrator should inform you if there is any delay and the reason for the delay.

Scene-setting:

The “*Research Degree Programmes Periodic Review Commentary*” has been written under the auspices of URDC by the Chair, Director of Graduate School, and sub-committee, to set the context for the provision at the time of the periodic review. As such, this should be a useful starting point to quickly gain an understanding of the background to the provision and how it has been informed by relevant factors such as the QAA UK Quality Code Chapter B11 and University of Portsmouth’s Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes 2013.

It may also alert you to areas that you would like to investigate further.

In reading the evidence provided by the provision, the following considerations may help you in identifying areas of potential strength and areas for further investigation:

How effective have the Institutional arrangements for RDP Regulations and Academic Standards been across the provision?

Consider the appropriateness and effectiveness of the ways in which the University assures itself of the standards and quality of its RDPs

Are Institutional Academic Regulations, Code of Practice and Handbooks for RDPs comprehensive, clear, communicated to all stakeholders and regularly monitored?

Do the Graduate School, Faculties and Departments, QMD Research section, and their related committees: University Research Degrees Committee, Graduate School Management Board, and Faculty Research Degrees Committees, combine effectively to ensure that policies and procedures are consistently applied?

Is there effective monitoring of RDPs against internal and external benchmarks and targets? Considering the data provided, are the trends in withdrawal, progression, submission, and completion rates looking healthy and, where required, are actions taken in response to apparent trends to enhance outcomes?

Does the University have appropriate mechanisms to assure itself of the quality of its RDPs and the learning opportunities for its PGRS?

Does the University effectively reflect the QAA Quality Code Chapter B11 and the interests of other national bodies related to standards and quality in the area of RDPs?

(QAA Quality Code Chapter B11 Indicators 1, 2, and 3)

How has the continued quality of the research environment to support PGRS students been ensured?

Consider here both the intellectual and physical environment and how it is ensured that these are appropriate for PGRS and their support for doing and learning about research.

Intellectual: The quality of the research occurring and how that quality is recognised, for example, number of research active staff, research achievements and their impact.

Physical: The availability of and access to, appropriate facilities and resources within Faculties; and University-wide, for example, Library and IT.

(QAA Quality Code Chapter B11 Indicator 4)

How effective have the Selection, Admission and Induction arrangements been?

Consider the clarity, consistency and effectiveness of selection, admission and induction arrangements, for example:

Admissions: Are potential PGRS appropriately informed on programmes and admissions procedures? Are the Admissions policy and procedures suitable? Do they ensure that only suitably qualified and prepared applicants are admitted to research degree programmes? Are there consistent arrangements for ensuring equality of opportunity,

consistency, fairness, diversity? Is support and guidance given to staff making admissions decisions?

Induction: Are induction arrangements sufficiently comprehensive for both the academic and social environment? Do these include, for example, ethics, good practice in research, library, plagiarism; equality policies, health and safety. Information on PGRS support centrally and locally and communication with PGRS on their entitlements and responsibilities through written documentation such as handbooks, intranet, etc.

(QAA Quality Code Chapter B11 Indicator 5, 6, 7 and 8)

How has the continued appropriateness of Supervision been ensured and enhanced?

Consider the dissemination and implementation of policy and procedures for the appointment of a supervisory team with appropriate skills and subject knowledge. Are the various roles and responsibilities of the team, in particular, the First Supervisor, sufficiently understood by the team and PGRS and are they effective?

Is provision of supervisor training for new supervisors appropriate and compulsory? Is there continued professional development for experienced supervisors and take up and effectiveness monitored?

How well is the volume and range of responsibilities assigned to individual supervisors monitored to ensure it allows them sufficient time to carry out their responsibility effectively?

Is the effectiveness and consistency of supervisory team arrangements including timely arrangements for contact with the student monitored and reviewed?

(QAA Quality Code Chapter B11 Indicator 9, 10, 11 and 12)

How effective have progress and review arrangements been?

Consider the effectiveness and consistency of the mechanisms for supporting, monitoring and reviewing PGRS progress and the availability and nature of support where student progress is unsatisfactory.

Are there effective mechanisms for PGRS and supervisors to keep appropriate records of outcomes of meetings and related activities?

(QAA Quality Code Chapter B11 Indicator 13)

Development of research and other skills

Does the University ensure that PGRS are able to develop their intellectual, research and transferable skills?

Are appropriate personal and professional development planning approaches used to identify and review the research training and transferable skills needs of PGR? Is there relevant availability of training and development and are PGRS suitably informed of this?

Reflect on the institution's policy for recognition of prior learning for research skills and how this is monitored.

Consider the training and development provided for PGRS undertaking teaching and/or demonstrating roles and how its take up and completion is monitored.

Consider opportunities for PGRS to interact with each other and how well PGRS are integrated into the overall research environment of the University, for example, through seminars, symposia and similar events as evidenced across the University.

Consider how well e learning and VLEs are used to enhance training.

Reflect on provision of PGRS employment advice and guidance.

(QAA Quality Code Chapter B11 Indicator 14, www.vitae.ac.uk/rds and www.vitae.ac.uk/rdf)

PGRS representation and feedback mechanisms

Consider how well the University works in partnership with its PGRS including how evaluation is sought.

Are there appropriate procedures for PGRS representation and contribution to RDP committees and review panels locally and centrally and are these effective?

Are there effective mechanisms, for collection of written feedback from PGRS, both locally and centrally, and are outcomes appropriately reviewed and responded to by FRDC, GSMB and URDC? Is there communication with students on outcomes of feedback including any key actions?

Is evaluation sought from other stakeholders such as Supervisors and External Examiners and is this used to inform enhancements?

(QAA Quality Code Chapter B11 Indicator 15 and www.heacademy.ac.uk/PRES)

Assessment

Consider the clarity of assessment procedures, including criteria and timeliness, and rigorous, fair and consistent application of these procedures. Is there good communication of assessment procedures to PGRS, supervisors and examiners?

Consider the preparation of PGRS for viva and the operation of the viva including how fairness and transparency are secured including use of External Examiners and, as appropriate, Independent Chairs.

(QAA Quality Code Chapter B11 Indicators 16, and 17)

Complaints and appeals

Consider clarity, fairness, consistency and communication of procedures for complaints and appeal. Do these procedures appear to be effective and are any key actions identified to enhance provision? *(nb this will be general not identifying individual cases)*

(QAA Quality Code Chapter B11 Indicator 18)

Collaborative research degree partnerships

From the list of Collaborative and FDL with a partner arrangements and the FRDC reports, is it apparent how the University ensures academic standards and quality of learning opportunities for these arrangements – this may need discussion to be fully apparent. *(There are few of these arrangements so not all FRDC reports will refer to them).*

Summary statement on the overall health of RDP provision

In view of the above considerations, reflect on how well the University principles for Research Degrees as identified in the University Code of Practice for Research Degree programmes are met.

Communicating your ‘initial findings’ prior to the review event:

Based on your review of the documentation, you are asked to forward a paper on some initial views of ‘strengths’ and ‘areas that may require further clarification/investigation’ and to let us know if there is any **essential** further documentation you would like the Chair to request is made available for the event. This should be sent to the University Facilitator in Quality Management Division (who will contact you by email in advance) no later than one week prior to the event.