



Teaching Intensive Research Informed

# Code of Practice for Research Students and Supervisors

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## Code of Practice for Research Students and Supervisors

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The intention of this Code is to provide guidance and practical advice for both supervisors and research students. It should be read in conjunction with the University's Postgraduate Research Degree Regulations which is available to all research students and their supervisors.
- 1.2 The supervision of postgraduate students is clearly personal in character, and influenced by many factors, including the personalities involved and the environment in which student and supervisor work. There are also bound to be considerable variations in supervisory practice between disciplines. For these reasons the Code does not attempt to describe in exact detail the academic role of supervisors. Rather it aims to identify those aspects of good supervisory practice which are common to all disciplines and to define the mutual responsibilities of supervisors and students. The Code deals with supervision of all candidates for MPhil and PhD by research, whether undertaken on- or off-campus, by full-time or part-time study, or by thesis, practice, or published work. The Code sets out University policy on good supervisory practice and provides a framework within which all students may benefit from a worthwhile and high quality research experience. If students are unclear about any aspects of the Code they should in the first instance approach their Director of Studies or the Research Coordinator in their University academic department<sup>1</sup>. If more appropriate to the circumstances, students should consult another appropriate member of staff either in their University academic department or for their particular off-campus location.

## **2. Requirements of Supervisors and Students**

### **Formal Progress Monitoring**

- 2.1 The University's Board of Studies for Research Degrees is responsible for the formal approval and monitoring of all research student registrations and research degree programmes of study and attaches great importance to the application of standard procedures across all academic departments, subject areas and off-campus centres. The Code of Practice for Research Students and Supervisors is part of the process whereby the quality of the research student experience is assured and monitored. In addition, supervisors and students should note that the monitoring of progress, from initial admission to final examination, is governed by the University's Postgraduate Research Degree Regulations which place formal requirements upon supervisors, students and Research Co-ordinators to monitor and report upon progress to the Board of Studies for Research Degrees.
- 2.2 Details of these procedures are available in the Postgraduate Research Degree Regulations. It is sufficient to note here however that supervisors and students will need to comply with the following requirements:

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<sup>1</sup> Depending upon the prevailing organisational structure of the University, the 'academic department' might be an Academic Group, Faculty, Institute, School, Centre, Subject Department, Group, Field, Area or Division, or any other unit which is constitutionally empowered to undertake the relevant activities.

## **Research Student Progress**

Stage One - Approval of Application for Admission as a Research Student according to the detailed procedures currently in force;

Stage Two - Initial enrolment as a research student with the University and completion of the Postgraduate Skills Record, as follows:

- Project Planning (1 month FT, 2 months PT);
- Postgraduate Induction (1 month FT, 2 months PT);
- Research Student-Supervisor Agreement (1 month FT, 2 months PT);
- Research Progress Monitoring (following any formal student-supervisor contact);
- Research Progress Report and Action Plan (2 months FT, 4 months PT).

Stage Three - Formal Progress Monitoring via the submission to the Board of Studies for Research Degrees of:

- Application to Register for a Research Degree (R1) (within four months of registration – six months if part-time);
- Research Action Plan (Mandatory Submission 4);
- Annual Progress Review.

## **Research Proposal Approval**

In addition to the above procedures for monitoring admission and progress of the student, the student's research proposal and programme of study will be subject to the following process of approval by the Board of Studies for Research Degrees:

Stage One - Annual Progress Review to be completed in May;

Stage Two - Request for Transfer of Registration from MPhil to PhD or Mid-Programme Assessment of Progression for PhD direct candidates;

Stage Three - Request for Approval of Examination Arrangements;

Stage Four - Consideration of the Recommendation made by the Examiners on a Research Degree Thesis.

Further details of all the above requirements, which are designed to safeguard the standard of the University's research degrees and the interests of research students, are contained within the Postgraduate Research Degree Regulations.

### **3. Definition of Roles**

- 3.1 Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that students receive all the help and advice together with any essential facilities necessary to enable them to carry out their proposed research topic and to obtain a comprehensive training in research methods.
- 3.2 The Director of Studies is the person appointed as the student's principal supervisor who is responsible for overseeing and monitoring the student's progress and co-ordinating the involvement of other supervisors.
- 3.3 The research student must take full advantage of the facilities and supervision offered but also has a responsibility to seek advice and help from the sources identified in this Code if problems arise and to comply with the requirements of the University's Postgraduate Research Degree Regulations.
- 3.4 Research Co-ordinators and other designated University and off-campus centre post-holders are responsible for making sure that all research students enrolled within the academic department (whether on- or off-campus) are progressing satisfactorily and receiving the help and advice they require. The Research Co-ordinator should always consult with the student's supervisors in order to ensure that progress is being maintained. In all academic departments there should be a formal deliberative mechanism to ensure collective discussion of research and research degrees matters.
- 3.5 The Board of Studies for Research Degrees is responsible for the maintenance of the academic standards of programmes leading to the award of degrees by research, including the control of all matters relating to the registration, supervision, satisfactory progress and examination of research students.
- 3.6 A designated post-holder and the Research Degrees Administrator are responsible at University level for all matters relating to the central management and administration of research degree programmes, whilst a separate designated post-holder is responsible at University level for the implementation and oversight of all the University's quality and standards procedures and regulations relating to research students. These post-holders are assisted by other University and off-campus centre staff.

### **4. The Start of the Relationship: Application and Admission**

#### **The Admissions Process**

- 4.1 In addition to any screening and scrutiny by central admissions staff and designated University and off-campus centre post-holders, a student's application will be considered within the appropriate academic department and a decision will be made at this stage concerning the general area of study and potential supervisors. It will be normal practice for intending research students to be interviewed and their qualifications and suitability judged against the criteria for admission stated in the University's Postgraduate

Research Degree Regulations. Areas of mutual interest and potential supervisors can be discussed with the applicant at this stage. Formal letters offering an applicant a place as a postgraduate student by research are sent by the central admissions staff and accompanied by supplementary offer information compiled by the Research Degrees Administrator. If not fully agreed prior to admission, the topic definition and supervisor identification should be undertaken as soon as possible after the student's arrival. Supervisors must be allocated to postgraduate research students even if they are to be involved only in preparatory studies prior to agreeing and embarking on a research project.

- 4.2 Students whose first language is not English may be required to sit an English test prior to being accepted. This requirement should be specified in any offer of admission. A student may also be required or recommended to undertake additional English language tuition as a condition of being able to carry out a research degree satisfactorily. It is the responsibility of the Director of Studies to advise the student of the importance of this remedial English language training and to seek to ensure that the student attends.
- 4.3 International students, even when English is their first language, often have problems adjusting to life away from home, especially when separated from their families. Advice and help is available from Student Services and the International Office. There is also an International Society which brings together students from overseas who are studying at the University. Details of these services are available on the University's website.
- 4.4 Research students will normally be registered initially as postgraduate students by research for either an MPhil or a PhD via MPhil award, although students satisfying the relevant regulation may be registered directly for a PhD. An initial period of registration provides the opportunity to assess the research potential of the candidate and for the preparation of a research degree proposal, before retrospective registration for a particular degree is decided. It also provides an opportunity for the candidate to assess his or her aptitude for research. Registration of research students takes place following approval of the students' research proposals by the Board of Studies for Research Degrees.

### **Appointment of Supervisors and the Director of Studies**

- 4.5 Supervisors are allocated by the academic department (and may where relevant include nominees proposed by an off-campus centre), normally at the time it accepts an applicant for admission to postgraduate study and subject to the subsequent formal approval of the Board of Studies for Research Degrees at the time it considers the student's research proposal. Research Co-ordinators are responsible to their Head of academic department for arranging the nomination of supervisors and other aspects of the oversight of supervisor-student relationships.
- 4.6 Section 5 of the Postgraduate Research Degree Regulations provides full guidance on the appointment of a supervisory team.

- 4.7 In many research programmes other staff members or external collaborators will be involved in supervision in an informal advisory capacity, especially if specialised equipment is to be used. It is the duty of the Director of Studies to ensure that these staff members or external collaborators are aware of their responsibilities and are prepared to offer the necessary assistance to the student.

## **5. Project Planning**

- 5.1 Students are required to complete an outline of their intended project at an early stage (within one month if full-time or two months if part time). This is intended to help clarify the aims of their research and to begin to identify the specific approaches and techniques they will need to apply. Directors of Studies should assist their students with this task and ensure that the Project Planning form (in the Postgraduate Skills Record) is completed and submitted as directed.

## **6. Postgraduate Induction**

- 6.1 In parallel with Project Planning, students need to become aware of the facilities and services available to them in support of their research work in the academic department and in the University more generally (and in their off-campus centre if applicable). To aid in this process the Postgraduate Induction form (in the Postgraduate Skills Record) should be completed by students with assistance from their Director of Studies and submitted (within one month if full-time or two months if part-time) as directed. In completing the form students should investigate the facilities provided and identify any areas needing attention. Through discussion with their Director of Studies and others students should be able to fill gaps in their knowledge or become aware of what they need to do to acquire the relevant information.

## **7. The Research Student - Supervisor Agreement**

- 7.1 Once all arrangements have been confirmed for the supervision of a student by an academic department, research students must complete a Research Student - Supervisor Agreement (in the Postgraduate Skills Record).
- 7.2 This Agreement is designed to define mutual responsibilities and obligations relating to the proposed research programme and to establish the timescale, supporting facilities, research training and other related conditions which are deemed to be essential for the research programme to be completed successfully. As such it constitutes a basic research plan against which progress can be monitored by the supervisor, the student and by the University.
- 7.3 Because of the significance of this document it is important that it is authorised by the student and the Director of Studies and also by the Head of the student's University academic department or their nominee. This authorisation is essential because the Research Student - Supervisor

Agreement should make clear the frequency of access to supervisors and the facilities which are to be made available to the student by the department (and, if applicable, by other collaborative establishments). It therefore forms a research 'contract' between the supervisor and the student upon which to proceed with the research work and requires both sides to define an effective working relationship and set of working conditions. The agreement of the Director of Studies, the student and the Head of academic department or their nominee will be required as confirmation that all parties understand the basis upon which individual research programmes will be carried out.

- 7.4 It should be made clear to students by their Director of Studies and Research Team Leader as appropriate, exactly what facilities and resources are to be made available to them in relation to their research and to any teaching duties that they may be asked to undertake (see section 16.5). It is a requirement of the Research Student-Supervisor Agreement and of the Application to Register for a Research Degree that the facilities to be made available to the student are known and agreed in writing by all relevant parties.
- 7.5 Because of the special status of postgraduate research students they are normally entitled to facilities beyond those afforded to other registered students of the University. They should have a suitable place to work, conducive to engaging in research-related activities; this should usually be in the Department with which they are registered, unless this is felt by the student and others to be disadvantageous, e.g. in cases where cross-disciplinary research supervision is being offered. Students should have access to telephone, electronic mail, fax, wordprocessing, photocopying and general computing facilities. They should be informed of the arrangements for access, any conditions or limitations on usage and how to use University facilities (eg. for photocopying) where necessary.
- 7.6 Additionally full-time postgraduate research students should normally be given access to suitable office accommodation in which they can work whilst attending the University. This accommodation would normally be available on a shared desk basis (usually referred to as a 'hot desk' arrangement). It may be the case that postgraduate research students who are undertaking predominantly laboratory/studio based research would be better served by dedicated access (again on a shared basis) to the facilities most suited to their research in lieu of office accommodation. This must be discussed and agreed with the student during the completion of the Research Student-Supervisor Agreement. The same issues should be discussed with part-time postgraduate research students but in most cases the nature of their mode of study would mean that offering dedicated accommodation (in the manner described for full-time students) would be irrelevant. Again this is a subject for discussion and recording on the Research Student-Supervisor Agreement.
- 7.7 Students should be told about any services available to them via clerical, administrative and technical support staff, about any procedures in operation for requesting these services and any systems used for scheduling work and logging its completion.



- 7.8 The library facilities available to students should be made clear. Note that research students normally have the same library borrowing rights within the University as do members of academic staff (i.e. currently 15 volumes for 3 weeks plus no charge for inter library loans). Local resource centres, if any, as well as the availability of central support for learning and teaching (e.g. educational technology) should be pointed out to students.
- 7.9 Students should be made aware of the laboratory facilities open to them and any conditions of access or usage, health and safety matters, risk assessment and so on. The facilities available in other Departments may sometimes be of interest and the procedures for securing access to them ought to be passed on to students as and when needed.
- 7.10 The Research Student - Supervisor Agreement should be formally submitted to the Research Degrees Administrator within one month (FT) or two months (if PT) of enrolment. It will then be authorised by the designated University post-holder, the student and the supervisor(s) notified accordingly, and the authorised original kept in the student's file. The logging of this agreement is part of the procedures whereby the monitoring of the individual student's progress will be followed up via the Postgraduate Skills Record and the forms contained therein. This latter document should be seen as the framework for recording the progress made by students and for establishing the basis of an effective and supportive relationship between supervisors and students. Directors of Studies should make sure therefore that they complete these documents in conjunction with their students and that they are submitted to the appropriate University authorities according to the timescales laid down.

## **8. Research Progress Monitoring**

- 8.1 Supervisors, in conjunction with their student, should ensure that after each formal supervision contact a note is kept of the issues discussed and the agreed outcomes. The Research Progress Monitoring form (in the Postgraduate Skills Record) is designed for the supervisor and student to have an agreed record of discussions and decisions to inform subsequent contacts and to provide a record of progress with the research. Whilst it is not currently mandatory to use this particular method for recording contacts, what is crucial is that a written record is retained of every formal contact and that it addresses the matters contained in the Research Progress Monitoring form.

## **9. Research Action Plan and Annual Progress Review**

- 9.1. Directors of Studies must ensure that a Research Action Plan (in the Postgraduate Skills Record) is completed by students according to the timescales laid down and submitted as directed. This form is designed to facilitate discussion and recording of a student's progress with their research and to encourage target setting with timescales. It is completed shortly after enrolment (within two months if full-time, four months if part-time) to establish a baseline profile, then it should be revised on an annual basis, normally in May/June each year.

- 9.2 The Board of Studies for Research Degrees, through its Standing Panels, will scrutinise the Annual Progress Review for each student and receive a summary of recommendations on each student's progress together with a note of any general issues arising from consideration of the entire cohort. The Board will then take such action as it deems appropriate either in individual cases or in more general respects.
- 9.3 The importance of the Annual Progress Review and Research Action Plan should be noted by all supervisors and students. The Annual Progress Review is the key, University-level, annual record of a research student's progress and confirmation that a student is still actively engaged in their research. As such, the document is not only crucial to the implementation of the University's quality assurance procedures for research degrees but also to satisfying the needs of public and private research funding and quality assurance bodies, eg UKRI and QAA. Crucially, without completing this process the student will be unable to re-enrol for the subsequent year of study.

## **10. Researcher Development Framework (RDF)**

- 10.1 In September 2010 Vitae ([www.vitae.ac.uk](http://www.vitae.ac.uk)) launched the national Researcher Development Framework (RDF - [www.vitae.ac.uk/rdf](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/rdf)). The RDF is designed to help empower researchers and engage them in effective personal and professional development planning. By being more aware of their skills and having a plan for future development it is designed to help them to make the right choices at the right times in their careers.
- 10.2 The RDF describes the knowledge, behaviours and attitudes of researchers at all stages of development from first year postgraduate researchers through to high profile research leaders. It has been developed from first principles through interviews with successful researchers in a range of disciplines and is fully endorsed by Research Councils UK and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.
- 10.3 The RDF is structured in four domains (A-D), which encompass what researchers need to know to do research, how to be effective in their approach to research, when working with others and in contributing to the wider environment. The domains are further divided into sub-domains (e.g. A1, A2 and A3), each with descriptors and phases (1-5, representing a progressively higher level of skills in that area) which seek to capture the knowledge, behaviours, and attitudes of a typically 'good' researcher at different stages of development.
- 10.4 Research students (and supervisors and other researchers) might want to use the RDF as an extension to the Postgraduate Skills Record to help them to:
- prepare for one-on-one reviews, e.g. with your supervisor or line-manager, where you will be discussing your professional or career development;
  - identify strengths and areas to focus on;

- prioritise the most appropriate formal and informal development opportunities provided by their institution and/or external bodies;
- consider skills and experiences that will enhance their prospects of success in particular career areas.

10.5 Vitae have also launched a Professional Development Planner to help researchers map themselves against the RDF. This self-reflection tool is available under individual subscription from <http://rdfplanner.vitae.ac.uk/>. It allows researchers to:

- select which areas of the RDF they are interested in;
- record where they are currently and what their next target for development is;
- record evidence of their current skills and experience;
- complete an action plan to reach their target;
- save individual versions at different time points to track their own progress.

10.6 Although the RDF is not currently a compulsory component of the University's quality assurance procedures for research degrees, students and supervisors are nevertheless encouraged to engage with it, particularly in the case of full-time students who are more likely to be at the early stages of embarking on an academic career and less likely to have developed these skills through employment or other experience. The process of encouragement to engage with the RDF is reinforced through the Research Progress Report and Action Plan, where students are asked whether they have engaged with the Framework.

## 11. The Roles and Responsibilities of Supervisors, Research Students and Research Co-ordinators

### Supervisors and Directors of Studies

11.1 Supervisors are critical to the success of a student's research work. It is the supervisors' role to assist the student in defining the topic of research either before arrival at the University, in the early weeks of study, or as soon as possible thereafter. Although there is some evidence that students are better motivated when they choose their own research topic, local circumstances may mean that a free choice is impossible. It is very important that student and supervisors agree on the choice of research topic as early as possible and together identify the sequence of events which will culminate in a finished thesis. Between them they must ensure, after consultation as necessary with the Research Co-ordinator and Head of academic department that:

- (i) the project is one which is within the supervisors' field of expertise;
- (ii) the project can be achieved with the resources that are available (taking into account internal and any external resources relevant to the research);

- (iii) the project is suitable for the degree which the student aims to undertake and should be capable of completion within the appropriate prescribed period of study as laid down in the Postgraduate Research Degree Regulations. Experience suggests that in some fields, perhaps especially in the Humanities, students need to be cautioned to avoid over-ambition - the attempt at a definitive study of too large a subject;
  - (iv) the Director of Studies is likely to be available throughout the prescribed period of study, and in particular at the beginning of the period;
  - (v) if particular conditions relating to study or examination have been specified at the time of admission, for example the acquisition of computing skills or knowledge of a foreign language, then ways of implementing them should be agreed and these should be noted in the Research Student-Supervisor Agreement.
- 11.2 It cannot be stressed too strongly that the success of a student in his or her research depends to a large extent on the help and guidance that the supervisors offer, especially in the early stages of the work, and close personal contact at this time is essential if later difficulties are to be avoided. Contacts between students and supervisors will need to be frequent throughout the first year. Fortnightly contacts would not seem unreasonable during the early stages and prior to key points such as: submission of the R1 research proposal; transfer from MPhil to PhD/mid-programme assessment of progression; and final submission. However the frequency of contacts will vary from discipline to discipline and be a matter for agreement between supervisors and students.
- 11.3 Part-time and off-campus students may encounter characteristic obstacles. It may be difficult to arrange synchronous, face-to-face contacts with the supervisors (whether in-person or online); part-time students may find it difficult to set priorities and provide enough free time for research. Supervisors should be aware of these problems and attempt to deal with them sympathetically, while still ensuring that the student embarks upon the project without undue delay. The feasibility of a proposed research project by part-time study must be examined particularly closely during the initial preparation period.
- 11.4 Although the work reported in the thesis is the work of the student it is the supervisors' role to provide guidance on the structure and content of the thesis. The Director of Studies is responsible to the Head of academic department (or to the appropriate authority in an off-campus centre if contracted to them), for the following duties:
- (i) agreeing with the student a suitable field of study which will stimulate research interest and can be completed within an acceptable and reasonable period of time;

- (ii) consulting with the Research Co-ordinator and others as necessary to ensure that the necessary facilities are available and as far as possible that there is sufficient time allocated for the student and supervisor to develop a good working relationship;
- (iii) where necessary arranging liaison with additional supervisors and/or with collaborating bodies;
- (iv) arranging regular contacts with the student at which all matters relating to the student's work can be discussed with the supervisor(s) and where full oral and/or written feedback can be provided on the student's work;
- (v) making adequate alternative supervisory arrangements if (s)he is to be absent for a consecutive period exceeding 6 weeks;
- (vi) discussing the student's progress with the Research Co-ordinator and/or the Head of academic department and/or other appropriate staff, such discussion, where relevant, to include their suitability for further study, including transfer from MPhil to PhD/mid-programme assessment of progression for PhD direct candidates;
- (vii) arranging, in conjunction with the Research Co-ordinator and other appropriate staff, relevant programmes of research training and related studies for students;
- (viii) the completion and submission on time of all of the required components of the University's Postgraduate Research Degree Regulations. These components encompass Project Planning, Postgraduate Induction, Research Student-Supervisor Agreement, Research Action Plan, Annual Progress Review, Application to Register for a Research Degree, Application to Transfer Registration from Master of Philosophy to Doctor of Philosophy/Mid-Programme Assessment of Progression for PhD Direct Candidates;
- (ix) offering pastoral as well as academic support so that problems can be identified at an early stage and appropriate steps taken to obtain suspensions or extensions of a student's registration as rapidly as possible if they are necessary;
- (x) drawing up, with the student, a thesis structure and a timetable for completion of the work;
- (xi) assisting the student as required with their reflection on, and creation and recording of, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) documents as a record of their development as a researcher and in broader career development terms.

In order to accomplish these tasks effectively the Director of Studies must maintain regular contact with the student.

- 11.5 Research students rely on contact with their supervisors for general guidance and intellectual stimulation. Supervisors must maintain regular contact with their students, who in turn have a responsibility to make themselves available at times agreed with their supervisors. Supervisors should be approachable and available for consultation at reasonable times. The period of initial registration is particularly crucial and in addition to regular contacts the student should feel free to consult their supervisor(s) as need arises. As time passes, the initiative for establishing contact may gradually pass to the student but the supervisor will continue to have responsibility for ensuring that at least minimum contact with the student is maintained. It is helpful to the student for both parties to set down in the Research Student - Supervisor Agreement and in the Research Progress Report and Action Plan those procedures and targets which need to be unambiguously understood, and agreed, by both sides. When the research is carried out in isolation from the University, the supervisors have a particularly crucial role in ensuring that the student is clear about the work to be undertaken and the student equally has a duty to maintain regular contact with their Director of Studies.
- 11.6 Supervisors should encourage students to play a full part in the intellectual life of their academic department, the University, their off-campus centre and the wider research community, as appropriate. Many students are slow to recognise the opportunities that postgraduate research presents for their own intellectual broadening and the supervisor has a key role in helping them to develop their talents widely and to the full. Involvement in research seminars, conferences, research methodology courses, teaching experiences and other relevant activities should be encouraged and students should seek out and be made aware of all such opportunities which may potentially be of benefit to them.

### **Absence of the Director of Studies**

- 11.7 Special arrangements must be made for maintaining the supervision of research postgraduate students whenever the Director of Studies is absent and an alternative supervisor must be found if the absence is for more than six consecutive weeks. Supervisors are not expected to be available throughout the summer vacation but even then the student should at least be informed when the supervisors will be available and special arrangements may need to be considered if the student is at a particularly crucial phase in their work. Continuity of supervision can be maintained much more easily if the second supervisor has been closely involved in the monitoring of the student's progress.

### **Research Students**

- 11.8 Students should feel free to bring any problems, including those of a social or medical nature, to the attention of their supervisors - especially if the problem is interfering with their work. If for any reason students feel unable to confide in their supervisors they should contact their Research Co-ordinator, the Head of their University academic department, or the designated University or off-

campus centre post-holder. All staff will treat such approaches with complete confidentiality. Students should not live with a problem and expect the supervisors to notice when something is wrong.

11.9 Students have a responsibility to devote the necessary time and effort to their research programmes in order to ensure a successful outcome and to participate actively in developing a fruitful relationship with their supervisors. To this end, students are responsible for:

- (i) pursuing their programme of study with a positive commitment, taking full advantage of the resources and facilities offered by the University and any collaborative bodies and the support and assistance of supervisors, other staff and other research students;
- (ii) agreeing with the supervisor the time to be allocated to the research, the type of guidance and support to be made available and the necessary facilities for the carrying out of the research and recording these in the Research Student - Supervisor Agreement at the commencement of the research programme;
- (iii) preparing a research degree proposal (R1) for submission to the Board of Studies for Research Degrees within four months (six months if part-time) from the date of initial enrolment with the University;
- (iv) agreeing with the supervisor a schedule of regular contacts and targets, recording the outcome of contacts and progress in relation to targets in the Annual Progress Review and Research Action Plan forms;
- (v) taking the initiative in raising problems or difficulties, however elementary, bearing in mind that prompt discussion and resolution of problems can prevent difficulties and problems at a later stage;
- (vi) presenting written work to supervisors at regular intervals for comment and discussion as the research work progresses;
- (vii) familiarising themselves with the requirements contained within the University's Postgraduate Research Degree Regulations and with the deadlines associated with initial registration, approval of the programme of study, transfer/mid-programme assessment of progression and final submission and examination;
- (viii) determining the timing of the presentation of the thesis, the accuracy and completeness of its content and its compliance with University regulations, taking due account of the supervisor's opinion, which is however only advisory;
- (ix) responding to any requirements for the amendment of a proposed programme of study or transfer/mid-programme assessment of

progression report made by the Board of Studies for Research Degrees or amendment to a thesis required by a team of examiners.

- (x) engaging with any programmes of research methods training or related studies which are part of the research programme of study.

11.10 Full-time, on-campus students will normally carry out their research in or near the University. Occasionally, it may be desirable or necessary for such students to conduct some of their research elsewhere. If the student is to be working away from the University for a significant period, then the Director of Studies must approve the arrangement in writing.

### **Difficulties in the Research Student-Supervisor Relationship**

11.11 One of the most important functions of the supervisor is to provide constructive criticism. When a student is making inadequate progress an over-friendly and uncritical attitude may delay conflict but it will not ultimately prevent it. Open and frank discussion from the outset can reduce conflict or prevent it arising. Supervisors and students may well find it helpful to record the outcomes of their discussions in Research Progress Monitoring forms and where a supervisor believes that progress has been consistently unsatisfactory this should be notified separately in writing to the student after discussing the problem with him or her. Unsatisfactory progress must also be reported at the initial reporting stage or at the annual progress report stage.

11.12 Occasionally the relationship between the student and supervisor(s) will break down. In these circumstances outside help may be needed to resolve the difficulties. The Director of Studies has the responsibility to attempt to resolve conflicts which may arise and may seek assistance from the Research Co-ordinator or other appropriate staff, on- or off-campus as relevant to the case. If this is not appropriate or satisfactory then the Head of academic department or, if the latter is inappropriate or satisfactory, the designated University or off-campus centre post-holder or their nominee should be consulted. A concerns procedure exists for the presentation of formal complaints and this is noted in paragraph 11.17.

11.13 Students too should recognise that they can ask for guidance or help. If the student is unable to broach the problem with the Director of Studies, the student should approach the Research Co-ordinator or other appropriate staff, on- or off-campus as relevant to the case, who will advise on appropriate action. If this is not appropriate or satisfactory then the Head of academic department or, if the latter is inappropriate or satisfactory, the designated University or off-campus centre post-holder or their nominee should be consulted. Student Services can also be approached at any stage to offer independent guidance and advice.

### **Research Co-ordinators**

11.14 Research Co-ordinators within each subject area have the responsibility (subject to the authority of the Head of academic department) for ensuring



that there is an appropriate environment within which research can take place, for overseeing and co-ordinating all matters related to research and research students and for liaising with the University's Board of Studies for Research Degrees and central research administration to ensure that institutional policies and procedures are complied with. They have an important role to play in supporting the work of research students and their supervisors and in monitoring the progress of individual research programmes taking place within an academic department or subject area. They are responsible for the operation of the monitoring and co-ordinating functions which are overseen by the relevant departmental board or sub-committee.

- 11.15 In relation to the role of supervisors and research students and to the management and administration of research degree programmes, Research Co-ordinators have the following specific responsibilities:
- (i) approving the admission of research students into an academic department and the appropriateness of their proposed programmes of study;
  - (ii) ensuring that proper supervisory arrangements are in place for all research students and that they are operating effectively;
  - (iii) ensuring compliance of supervisors and students with all University Postgraduate Research Degree Regulations and procedures;
  - (iv) ensuring that the necessary facilities and resources are available within an academic department for individual research programmes to be carried out prior to the initial registration of students;
  - (v) organising, in conjunction with supervisors and other staff, programmes of research methods training and related studies;
  - (vi) ensuring that research students are familiarised with academic department and University resources and equipment relevant to their research, that they are given appropriate training in the use of equipment and that they are made aware of any health and safety implications of their research work;

- (vii) liaising with supervisors and/or students to deal with any problems or complaints which may arise during the carrying out of a student's research programme;
- (viii) liaising with the University's Board of Studies for Research Degrees and central research administration on all matters relating to research degree programmes;
- (ix) convening, as appropriate, a departmental research committee or sub-committee or other research grouping to facilitate the co-ordination of research degree activity in the academic department or subject area and its effective monitoring;
- (x) ensuring on behalf of the academic department that research students are making satisfactory progress and that appropriate supervisory and resource support is maintained throughout a student's programme of study.

**Procedures to be followed in cases of unsatisfactory performance by a research student**

11.16 In cases where a student appears to be failing to make satisfactory progress with a programme of research then depending on the nature of the problem the following actions shall be taken:

- (i) as soon as the student's apparent lack of progress becomes a concern, the student shall be contacted by the Director of Studies and the nature of the reasons for the lack of progress ascertained;
- (ii) if there are justifiable reasons for the lack of progress they shall be noted in the Research Progress Report and Action Plan together with any agreed actions to be taken to improve progress;
- (iii) if the reasons are related to extraneous problems which are preventing the student from concentrating upon the research programme, a suspension or extension of registration may be applied for to the Board of Studies for Research Degrees (see section 15 of this Code of Practice, and the Postgraduate Research Degree Regulations);
- (iv) if the problems arise from the student's inability to complete the research degree for which (s)he is registered, the Director of Studies shall recommend to the Board of Studies for Research Degrees either that the student's registration for a research degree be terminated or, specifically in the case of students registered for a PhD direct or PhD via MPhil, that their registration shall be amended to MPhil only.
- (v) In all cases where a recommendation is made to terminate or alter a student's registration, the reasons shall be given in writing to the student and a formal report presented to the Board of Studies for Research Degrees. The Board of Studies for Research Degrees shall

consider each such case and make the final decision. The student shall have an opportunity to present his or her views to the Board prior to a final decision being taken by the Board on termination of registration or re-registration.

### **Concerns Procedures**

- 11.17 Independent of the University's Appeals Regulations and Procedures, research students may have a concern about the conditions relating to their programme of study or the operation of supervisory arrangements during the course of undertaking their research. If such a concern arises the student should first of all approach the Director of Studies or other persons and try to resolve any problems informally (see paragraphs 11.11 to 11.13). If this proves not to be possible then the following procedures will apply:
- (i) the student must notify the Research Co-ordinator in the University academic department and the designated off-campus centre post-holder in the case of an off-campus centre of the specific nature of the concern;
  - (ii) the Research Co-ordinator must consult with the student and the supervisors and try to resolve the concern, if necessary by consultation with the Head of academic department and/or other designated University and/or off-campus centre post-holder; the student must then be informed of the outcome by the Research Co-ordinator;
  - (iii) the Research Co-ordinator must notify the Board of Studies for Research Degrees of any actions taken in response to student concerns and, if any changes to confirmed supervisory arrangements are proposed as a result, must seek the approval of the Board for the revised arrangements;
  - (iv) research students shall have the right to comment on the way in which a concern has been handled, by writing to the Research Degrees Administrator, who shall be responsible for drawing such comments to the attention of the Board of Studies for Research Degrees for any further investigation it deems to be necessary.
  - (v) research students have the right, notwithstanding these concern procedures, to lodge a formal complaint in respect of the University's services by using the Student Complaints Procedures.

### **Programmes of Research Training and Related Studies**

- 11.18 Directors of Studies, in conjunction with Research Co-ordinators, are responsible for devising relevant programmes of research methods training and related studies for research students. Research students are required to follow agreed programmes as an essential part of their research training at the University. Arrangements will necessarily vary according to the nature of the disciplines concerned but all students will be expected to have been

introduced to research methods and research methodologies, essential tools of analysis and research presentation skills (both oral and written). The University runs a Postgraduate Research Student Skills Development Programme each year which research students are required to attend unless they can demonstrate that they already possess the relevant skills and knowledge. The Board of Studies for Research Degrees, via its Standing Panels, will examine all initial applications for registration of research degree proposals (R1) to make sure that suitable programmes are in place for research students.

## **12. Writing Up and Submission of the Thesis**

- 12.1 Satisfactory completion of the thesis is the goal of the research programme and the supervisors must make every effort to ensure that the student completes in timely fashion. The process of writing up the thesis will differ between disciplines. In science and technology subjects, writing up is often concentrated towards the end of the prescribed period of study. In the humanities and social sciences writing up may be a much more continuous process with chapters being written over an extended period throughout the research programme. Whatever the case, supervisors should agree a schedule of common dates with the candidate and try to ensure that the student keeps to deadlines. These should be recorded in the Research Progress Monitoring form and Research Progress Report and Action Plan and monitored regularly.
- 12.2 The normal completion periods and normal and maximum registration periods for research degrees are stated in the Postgraduate Research Degree Regulations. Great importance is attached to completion of research degree programmes within the stated times and section 15 below describes the circumstances under which requests for suspension and extension of registration may be requested and the procedures for consideration of such requests.
- 12.3 Students are considered to be writing-up where they have completed their substantive research work and will not undertake any significant additional research. Such students will normally still receive some supervision and have access to facilities but they may be treated as writing-up if their Director of Studies confirms this in writing (form R11) to the Research Degrees Administrator, in which case the student will be eligible to pay the prevailing writing-up fee rather than the tuition fee.
- 12.4 Writing-up status will not however normally apply to students who remain within the normal completion period appropriate to their award and mode of study. Even if they are writing up their research, such students will continue to be liable for the normal tuition fees associated with their programme and mode of study until the normal completion period has expired and it is confirmed that they are writing-up.
- 12.5 Supervisors should draw the attention of students to the relevant sections of the Postgraduate Research Degree Regulations which specify the standards

for the format and binding of theses and to the regulations governing the maximum length of the theses. If a longer thesis is required for adequate treatment of the thesis topic, the Director of Studies must seek the approval of the Board of Studies for Research Degrees prior to submission.

- 12.6 The thesis must be the student's own work and (s)he has the responsibility for its eventual success or failure. The supervisors' role is to guide, assess, criticise, suggest solutions, and give encouragement. **The student may accept or reject the supervisors' opinion and must take ultimate responsibility for the content and presentation of the thesis.** Where supervisors have severe doubts about the quality of the thesis, criticisms should be made to the student in writing. The way in which advice is given on the writing of the thesis will vary from supervisor to supervisor and from discipline to discipline. All supervisors ought to see and comment on the first and subsequent drafts of a thesis, but they may see it in the form of a series of individual chapters rather than as a whole. The student should ensure that his/her Director of Studies and normally all other supervisors have had an opportunity to comment on a final draft of the thesis before submission. The form and presentation of the final version must however be the student's responsibility. Equally, students must be aware that criticism by a supervisor is not the same as the examination of the thesis and approval by a supervisor does not guarantee the success of the final version. It may become apparent when the supervisors see the initial stages of a PhD thesis that it is not going to be good enough for the degree. In this situation the supervisors can advise the student to submit instead for MPhil but the decision rests with the student. If a change of degree is envisaged the Board of Studies for Research Degrees will need to approve a change in registration category on the recommendation of the supervisors and the Research Co-ordinator.
- 12.7 It is important for students to allow sufficient time for the preparation and correction of the final version of the thesis prior to submission for final examination. Examination arrangements are submitted by the Director of Studies to the Board of Studies for Research Degrees at least three months before the expected date of examination. It is essential that once students have had their examination arrangements confirmed by the Board of Studies for Research Degrees, they are in a position to present their completed thesis six weeks before the expected date of examination. To assist in this process, students are required to notify the expected date of submission of their thesis as part of the application for approval of their examination arrangements. On the basis of this notification of the expected date of submission, a date for the oral examination of a student will be arranged normally after six weeks have elapsed from the date of submission of the thesis. Students and supervisors are recommended to consult the University's Postgraduate Research Degree Regulations so that they understand the formal requirements for thesis submission and examination.

### 13. Examiners and the Examination

- 13.1 All external examiner proposals and examination arrangements are subject to approval by the Board of Studies for Research Degrees according to the

criteria and procedures described in the Postgraduate Research Degree Regulations. It is the responsibility of the Director of Studies, in consultation with the supervisory team, Research Co-ordinator and others as necessary, to nominate examiners when the student is ready to give formal notice of their intention to submit the thesis. This should be done on the appropriate form. Students have no right to consultation on the names of the examiners and no external examiner may be appointed who has been a member of staff or a student of the University at any time during the previous three years.

- 13.2 An oral examination is an essential part of the assessment and must be held in all cases (except as otherwise exceptionally permitted by the Postgraduate Research Degree Regulations). The student's Director of Studies, other supervisor(s) and additional observers may be invited by the student to attend the oral examination but may not contribute unless invited to do so by the examiners. Students should be consulted to see if they have any objections to anyone other than the examiners being present at the oral examination. If they object then the observers should not attend.
- 13.3 An Independent Chair is appointed to every oral examination to help ensure that the examination is conducted fairly and in accordance with the regulations and procedures.
- 13.4 In cases where the student or one or more of the examiners is for good reason acceptable to the Board of Studies for Research Degrees not able to be present in person at the oral examination, a request may be granted, arising from the application for approval of the examination arrangements, to conduct the oral examination by video-conferencing. There are separate guidelines on the conduct of oral examinations by video-conferencing.
- 13.5 The criteria for assessment of theses, the procedure governing the examination and the recommendations open to examiners are described in the Postgraduate Research Degree Regulations and in the examiner's report forms. The examiners may tell the candidate what their views are at the end of, or after, the oral but they must make clear that their view is a recommendation to the Board of Studies for Research Degrees and not a decision.
- 13.6 The Director of Studies' role does not end after the examination. If there are minor revisions to be made to the thesis, these will be conveyed to the candidate and to the supervisor who should then confirm to the candidate the revisions to be made. The revised thesis is then examined by the internal examiners (and possibly also by the external examiner). Where the thesis is more seriously flawed, the examiners may recommend resubmission for the same degree after a further period of study under supervision. The candidate and the supervisors will obtain a statement of the aspects of the thesis requiring amendment and the supervisors should offer guidance as to what is required. The examiners may also recommend resubmission of a PhD thesis for MPhil with or without further modification. Candidates who are required to modify their theses will be given, as a matter of course, a clear indication of the aspects which require revision. When a thesis is rejected or a PhD thesis

is referred for MPhil, the candidate will be given a statement of the reasons why the thesis has not been accepted.

#### **14. Appeals Procedure for Research Degrees**

The University's Appeals Regulations and Procedures apply to all PGR students. These should be consulted if you wish to make an appeal.

#### **15. Suspension and Extension of Registration**

##### **Suspension**

- 15.1 Where a student is prevented by ill-health or other good cause from making progress with a research programme, the registration may be suspended upon application to the Board of Studies for Research Degrees, normally for not more than one year at a time. Applications for suspension should be made on the appropriate form and be supported by a recommendation from the Director of Studies. Periods of suspension will not count towards the student's maximum period of registration.

##### **Extension**

- 15.2 The maximum periods of registration for full-time and part-time students are stated in the Postgraduate Research Degree Regulations. Great importance is attached to completion of research degree programmes within the stated times and extension to registration periods will only be agreed to by the Board of Studies for Research Degrees where there are valid reasons. Applications for extension of registration periods should be submitted on the appropriate form as soon as possible prior to the end of the registration period and be accompanied by supporting medical or other evidence. The Board of Studies for Research Degrees will consider each case on its merits and may extend a student's registration by up to one year. Any extensions beyond this period will require a separate application to the Board.

#### **16. General Matters**

##### **Health and Safety**

- 16.1 Relevant health and safety legislation requires the University, as far as is reasonably practicable, to ensure the health and safety of all employees and students whilst at work. In the case of research work, supervisors are required to give careful attention to the health and safety of those under their supervision. The Research Co-ordinator and the Director of Studies are responsible for ensuring that research students are familiarised with health and safety procedures relevant to their work and that they are given appropriate training in the use of equipment and the handling of any substances hazardous to health. A risk assessment must be completed for each research project where the Director of Studies considers that potential hazards exist. Research students must accept the health and safety procedures which apply to their work and comply with any requirements

placed upon them by staff who have responsibility for the implementation of such procedures.

### **External Collaboration**

- 16.2 External collaboration can be an important element of any research degree programme and should be based on a shared understanding of, and agreement upon, what is involved in collaborative arrangements by all parties concerned. The submission of a proposal to the Board of Studies for Research Degrees should demonstrate that this understanding exists and that collaborative partners are supportive of the research and prepared to guarantee access to facilities, persons or equipment. In cases of commercially relevant research, there will need to be a clear understanding of what will form part of the examined research programme, publicly available to the academic community and with or without restricted access in the initial period after examination. There will also need to be a clear agreement about the intellectual property rights (copyright and/or patent rights) relating to the outcomes of the research work.

### **Intellectual Property Rights and Publication of Results**

- 16.3 Students are obliged to inform their supervisors forthwith of anything that is made, developed, discovered or otherwise produced during the course of their research that is capable of being patented. Internal supervisors must then act in accordance with their contract of employment by disclosing such information to the University through the appropriate authorities. To be valid, any prior or subsequent agreement relating to the sharing of commercial, financial or other returns from the exploitation of intellectual property must be approved by the University through the appropriate authorities, whether or not such an agreement includes a third party, e.g. an external sponsor.
- 16.4 Students are encouraged to publish the results of their research but must obtain the prior permission of their supervisors before making any written, oral or other disclosure which might prejudice intellectual property rights and any potential patent arising from the results. Any agreement relating to ownership of copyright and authorship of publications should be made in writing as early as possible in the life of the research project and, if possible, should be included in the Research Student-Supervisor Agreement. All publications arising from research carried out wholly or partly by a research student of the University must refer to any financial support provided by the University.

### **Part-Time Teaching**

- 16.5 Research students are encouraged to seek teaching opportunities with the University and excellent training and development is available, tailored to the nature and scale of a student's intended teaching commitment. The amount of teaching that research students may undertake is limited. For part-time students their load will depend on their other commitments. Full-time students may be permitted to undertake up to six hours per week of teaching duties (including preparation and marking time). If agreed by the Head of the



relevant academic department, students may receive payment for such work, and will then receive a separate contract. Such arrangements must have the approval of the Director of Studies for each individual student.

### **Fees**

- 16.6 The University will determine the fees to be paid for research supervision and the use of University facilities annually and will notify these to supervisors and students. Fees become due following enrolment with the University as a research student.

### **Ethical Matters**

- 16.7 Some research may raise questions of ethical propriety and will need to be considered in this light. It is important that supervisors guide students on these matters and that proper consideration is given to any ethical implications of a research proposal at an early stage. The University's Research Ethics Framework governs the required procedures. Academic departments, particularly in those disciplines where ethical issues frequently arise, should have formal procedures for examining ethical questions arising from research work. What is most important, however, is that whatever procedure is devised, a research student should be given all possible assistance to make sure that a research proposal is acceptable within the ethical standards relevant to a particular field of enquiry. Initial guidance can be found within the Code of Practice for Ethical Standards in Research Involving Human Participants and the Research Ethics Review and Approval Procedures.

### **16.8 Holidays**

- (i) Holidays are allowed for full-time students subject to the approval of the Director of Studies. Up to 40 working days (including public holidays and the 3 day closure between Christmas and New Year) in a twelve month period may be taken. This applies to students enrolling in September but where a student enrolls in January or May then during the first academic year ending in August, this will be a pro rata entitlement e.g. January start would entitle the student to 27 days (including public holidays) and starting in May would give an entitlement of 13 days (including public holidays).
- (ii) UKVI Tier 4 visa restricted students are not allowed to be absent from their studies at the University for more than 60 working days which includes the permitted holidays defined in paragraph 16.8 (i), periods of research overseas or a combination of both, and is not additional to the number of days in 16.8 (i). This applies irrespective of being absent from studies inside or outside the UK. Where there is any doubt then the student is advised to check with the University's Immigration and Welfare Officer for guidance.
- (iii) UKVI Tier 4 students wishing to book leave in order to work in excess

of 20 hours per week must book leave in blocks of 1 week (5 consecutive working days).

<b>CODE OF PRACTICE FOR RESEARCH STUDENTS AND SUPERVISORS</b>	
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