



# **PERIODIC QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW PROCESS FOR POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH DEGREE PROVISION**

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. Periodic review of postgraduate research degree provision is the process that the University uses to review the quality and standards of the postgraduate research degree provision offered by each defined review area. It is a reflective and evaluative process that provides the review area the opportunity to consider PGR provision in its entirety, including academic, administrative and support matters, and to receive constructive feedback from a panel of colleagues experienced in the delivery and management of PGR programmes.
- 1.2. Periodic Review highlights good practice so that valuable experience and knowledge can be shared across the University. Areas for development are identified and written into an action plan with appropriate responsibilities and timescales for completion.
- 1.3. Periodic Review is informed by the OfS Regulatory Framework, particularly the ongoing conditions of registration relating to quality **with which participants in the process should familiarize themselves** (see a brief summary of the definitions of key terminology at: [Office for Students Conditions of Registration relating to Quality](#)). The process also recognises the QAA's UK Quality Code for Higher Education and is aligned with the dimensions of the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES). The process is an important part of the University's approach to assuring the quality and standards of its postgraduate research degree provision.

## **2. Aims of periodic review**

The aims of periodic review of postgraduate research degree provision are to:

- 1.1. Support enhancement and improve postgraduate research students' learning experience through evidence-based evaluation and reflection;
- 1.2. Identify and share good practice;
- 1.3. Note areas of concern and remedial action;
- 1.4. Ensure adherence to the University's regulations, codes and guidance pertaining to research degrees and to relevant external body requirements, e.g. the Office for Students, the Quality Assurance Agency, and funding and research ethics agencies.

## **3. Guiding principles**

Periodic review of postgraduate research degree provision is intended to:

- 3.1 Be open, transparent, inclusive of stakeholders and responsive to their feedback;
- 3.2 Take account of the diverse nature of postgraduate research undertaken at the University;
- 3.3 Be informed by reliable and easily obtained data;
- 3.4 Impose as minimal a burden as possible on those involved, compatible with achieving the stated aims.

## **4. Scope of periodic review**

Periodic review will encompass those programmes of study leading to the degrees of MPhil and PhD (whether by research, practice, or published work and including equivalent specialist titles subject in their entirety to the Research Degree

Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Students and Supervisors). The review will cover a range of dimensions, exploring the research environment, processes for the management of research students and the experience of research students in a number of areas. Specifically, the review will explore:

- Action points addressed from the most recent periodic review report;
- Performance indicators;
- Supervision;
- Resources;
- Research culture/environment;
- Admissions, progress and assessment;
- Responsibilities;
- Research skills;
- Professional development and opportunities;
- Wellbeing;
- Motivations, career intentions and preparedness, withdrawal indicators;
- Provision of information to research students, staff and examiners;
- Feedback;
- Collaborative provision;
- Provisional new action plan arising from the evaluation.

## **5. Level, management, frequency and timetable for periodic review**

- 5.1 Periodic review will be conducted on 'review areas' comprising one or more Schools, Centres, Divisions, Subjects, and Off Campus Doctoral Centres, as determined each year by the advance schedule devised by relevant officer in the Standards and Enhancement Office, following consultation with relevant parties.
- 5.2 The process will be managed by the appointed officers in the Standards and Enhancement Office and supported by the Research and Doctoral Division (in particular by supplying documentary evidence requested by the Research Coordinator(s) for the review area).
- 5.3 Periodic review of postgraduate research degree provision will normally be carried out at least every 5-6 years, although it may be more or less frequent as determined by the Board of Studies for Research Degrees or one of its superordinate committees, or by an external body, or by other imperatives.
- 5.4 Indicative timescales and responsibilities for periodic review are provided in Annex 5. These may be adapted to accommodate the specific contexts applying to the review area, as long as the integrity of the review process is not compromised thereby.

## **6. The postgraduate research degree periodic review panel**

- 6.1 The Postgraduate Research Degree Periodic Review Panel (the Review Panel) will comprise members independent of the review area, including:
  - At least two, internal, academic staff (one of whom will chair the Review Panel and at least one of whom shall be a member of the Board of Studies for Research Degrees);
  - At least one postgraduate research degree student;

- At least one independent external reviewer.
- 6.2 An Officer from the Standards and Enhancement Office will act as Review Panel Secretary, providing advice, guidance and support to relevant parties prior to, during and subsequent to the review, taking minutes of meetings.
  - 6.3 The size and composition of the Panel will be determined by the Standards and Enhancement Office according to the scale and nature of the provision to be reviewed.
  - 6.4 The Chair of the Review Panel will allocate a number of specific areas to each panel member, from those described in A-N in Annex 1, for which members will be asked to draft the initial report commentary.

## **7. External reviewer**

- 7.1 The external reviewer should be an individual who holds or has recently held a senior position with responsibility for postgraduate research at another institution and who is able to comment on postgraduate research processes in general but who also possesses supervisory, examiner and researcher knowledge and experience in the subject(s) to be reviewed and a doctoral qualification or equivalent.
- 7.2 The external reviewer should not currently fulfill (or have fulfilled over the previous five years) any role (whether remunerated or not) for the University of Bolton; nor should they have (or have had over the previous five years) any close professional or personal relationship, whether direct or indirect, with any member of staff or student of the University who is either current or whose association with the University ended less than five years previously.
- 7.3 Nomination(s) for the role(s) of external reviewer should be made by the relevant Research Coordinator(s) or equivalent upon request by the Standards and Enhancement Office.

## **8. Information and process for periodic review**

***(Note that any and all of the engagements necessary to prepare for, conduct and administer the review process may be carried out remotely)***

- 8.1 The periodic review process will consist of a review and evaluation by the relevant review area, resulting in an evaluative report (typically 3,000 – 6,000 words in length) reflecting on key factors affecting the research student experience, including some defined student metrics, and a resultant action plan.
- 8.2 The metrics should include statistical data on student cohort sizes, completions, failures, withdrawals and continuing numbers for at least the previous 5 years; the current year's supervision loads and students' stage assessment picture; and results from a recent survey of PGR students, with accompanying student comments. Metrics will need to be derived, requested or extracted by the Research Coordinator(s) for the relevant review area, in collaboration with the appropriate University professional services, e.g. the Research and Doctoral Division, Student Data Management, Standards and Enhancement Office. Some

reports are already freely accessible to Research Coordinators<sup>1, 2, 3</sup>; this data can, if required, be exported to Excel then filtered and sorted to produce the required information sets.

- 8.3 The University's academic framework for postgraduate research degrees is well-documented, as is the research skills training programme for students and the supervisor development module; items from these sources will be made available to the Review Panel by the Designated Officer in the Standards and Enhancement Office, via links within the Moodle PDR, and therefore they will not need to be especially provided.
- 8.4 To help to support the veracity of claims made in the evaluative report, further written evidence **pertaining to the review area** should be supplied by the Research Coordinator(s) (and may additionally be requested by the Review Panel), for example, representative samples of:
- Admissions audit trails: applications, interview records, yellow forms;
  - Minutes of relevant Committees and Boards;
  - Standing Panel minutes and reports covering R1 and R2 reviews;
  - Information and guidance for students and supervisors;
  - Completed components of students' Postgraduate Skills Records, encompassing: Research Progress Monitoring, Project Planning, Post Graduate Induction, Research Student-Supervisor Agreement, Research Progress Report Action Plan, Research Student Annual Progress Review;
  - Information on the take-up of research skills training and supervisor development by students and staff;
  - Examiners' preliminary and final reports on theses for students;
  - Viva Chairs' reports;
  - Any other relevant data on the research student experience.
- 8.5 The size and configuration of these evidence samples will be determined by the Review Panel Chair, in collaboration with relevant officers in the Standards and Enhancement Office. The Research and Doctoral Division and the Standards and Enhancement Office will, as appropriate, support the Research Coordinator(s) with sourcing this evidence, upon request.
- 8.6 The relevant local Research Coordinator(s) or equivalent should conduct the review and evaluation and produce the evaluative report and action plan, using the templates provided, with the support of their academic colleagues and in consultation with postgraduate research students from the review area, including postgraduate research student representatives.
- 8.7 Evaluative reports and action plans, along with any additional evidence, should undergo scrutiny and approval at Subject, School or equivalent level(s), as appropriate to the review area and be submitted to the Standards and Enhancement Office by the Research Coordinator(s) or equivalent at least six weeks prior to the event.

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<sup>1</sup> [Enrolled Research Students](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Research Student Stage Assessment](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Research Students Completion](#)

- 8.8 The Standards and Enhancement Office will alert the Review Panel to the PDR ideally six weeks prior to the event. The Review Panel may request additional information or clarification normally up to three weeks prior to the event.
- 8.9 Lines of enquiry identified by the Review Panel will form the subject of recorded discussions held with relevant managers, research coordinators, supervisors, students and, where feasible, graduates and employers. It will be the responsibility of the relevant Research Coordinator(s) or equivalent to invite the participants, following the specification devised by the Review Panel Chair and Officer.

## 9. The periodic review event

- 9.1 A **sample** schedule for a review event is given below; this can be amended to accommodate particular needs:

9.30am Panel introductions

9.40am Brief context-setting presentation by Research Coordinator(s) to outline the key features of PGR in the review area

10.00am Private panel meeting to plan the approach to exploring the lines of enquiry with the various groups of staff and students

10.45am Break

11.00am Meeting with students (and alumni if feasible) from the review area (noting that, wherever possible, these students and alumni should not also be current staff of the University or at any of its collaborative partners)

12 noon Private panel meeting to assess progress, identify any provisional issues of concern and/or good practice, and note any outstanding lines of enquiry

12.30pm Lunch

13.15pm Meeting with supervisors from the review area (noting that, wherever possible, these supervisors should not also be current students of the University or at any of its collaborative partners)

14.15pm Meeting with staff from the review area with responsibilities for the management of PGR (noting that, wherever possible, the Panel expects to see any particular individual at only one meeting)

15.15pm Break

15.30pm Private panel meeting

16.00pm Feedback to staff from the review area

- 9.2 The Panel may decide to consult staff and students in advance of the review event or during the review, especially those engaged in part-time or in distance or collaborative modes. In the case of off campus provision, it will nevertheless be standard practice where circumstances permit for at least one member of the Review Panel to visit any Off Campus Doctoral Centre under review.

- 9.3 Sample discussion topics for meetings:

Although the Review Panel will identify its own lines of enquiry based on the documentary evidence, the following topics are offered as a guide to the general nature of discussions that might be expected at each meeting. *It is suggested that the identified lines of enquiry, plus any of the issues below which the Review Panel wishes to explore, are assigned where possible to one or more of the aspects A-N and hence to one or more panel members.*

- *Meeting with students (and alumni) from the review area:*
  - Pre-entry information and the application process;
  - Induction;
  - Research skills development (including generic and subject-specific provision);
  - Understanding of their programme of study and its requirements, including the skills developed;
  - The quality of supervision and the options available to a student if the relationship with the supervisor breaks down;
  - Learning support materials and resources (including library, IT, use of Moodle, handbooks, subject-specific resources such as labs);
  - The assessment process – whether students understand what is required and are aware of the assessment criteria;
  - Support for students with additional needs – disabilities, English language problems, personal difficulties, etc;
  - Opportunities to give feedback individually or as a group including the role of student representatives;
  - Wider academic and social activities, including postgraduate conferences and other opportunities to engage in the wider research activity of the review area.

The Review Panel will want to meet with normally at least six students covering all applicable modes of provision (full-time, part-time, distance learning) and types of programmes (MPhil, PhD by research, practice, published work) as applicable. Research Coordinator(s) are responsible for identifying and arranging for students to meet with the panel.

- *Meeting with supervisors from the review area:*
  - Information and guidance for supervisors;
  - Models of supervisor workload management;
  - Training for supervisors (both new and established);
  - Supervisors' understanding of the University's Code of Practice for Research Students and Supervisors, particularly their responsibilities and the action to be taken when there are difficulties in the research student-supervisor relationship;
  - Support offered to students;
  - The research environment for students and supervisors;
  - Supervisors' perceptions of the research student experience.

The Review Panel will want to meet with normally at least six supervisors covering, where possible, representatives from the various subjects and Schools or equivalent under review, and a range in terms of supervisory experience. Research Coordinator(s) are responsible for identifying and arranging for students to meet with the panel.



- *Meeting with staff from the review area responsible for the management of PGR:*
    - The alignment of postgraduate research activity with University and Faculty/School research strategy;
    - Action points from previous periodic review report;
    - Practical arrangements for managing and monitoring student admission, progress and assessment;
    - Training and support for supervisors and examiners;
    - The supervisor's role – concerns, good practice and support for enhancement;
    - Access to funding and other resources for research students;
    - Areas for development in relation to current research in the University and externally;
    - The research environment and the integration of research students within it;
    - Anything else which the review panel or management wish to raise and which falls within the scope of the review.
- 9.4 The Review Panel Secretary should produce the final report, normally within four weeks of the review meeting. Annex 2 provides the report template, with prompts for commentary. The text should provide a summative, evaluative assessment of the written evidence and of the views of students, supervisors and others with whom discussions have been held and include any commendations and recommendations. The Chair of the review Panel will approve the report for distribution to involved parties.
- 9.5 The review area will revise their preliminary action plan to incorporate any recommendations and commendations contained within the review report and submit it to the Chair of the Review Panel for approval within four weeks of the request being made by the Standards and Enhancement Office.
- 9.6 The Review Panel report and revised action plan will be received and discussed by the Board of Studies for Research Degrees (accompanied by the original evaluative report and action plan) and will be sent to the Education Committee for information.
- 10. Post-review reflection**  
To help inform enhancements to the periodic review process a post-review questionnaire will be distributed to those involved in the process and the outcomes analysed and acted upon by the Standards and Enhancement Office.
- 11. Follow-up**  
Once the Review Panel report and action plan has been approved by the Chair of the Review Panel it should be disseminated to relevant staff and students within the review area and discussed at the relevant review area fora. In addition, action plan items should be assimilated in some way within Subject (or comparable) Quality Enhancement Plans and progress with the action plan should be monitored in the relevant committees and boards.

## **12. Additional guidance and support**

- 12.1 The form which follows in Annex 1 provides some points for consideration in all of the substantive sections of the evaluative report and action plan. These points are neither exclusive nor exhaustive.
- 12.2 For further stimulus, Annex 3 of this document reproduces most of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education Advice and Guidance on Research Degrees, including the national Expectations and Practices for Research Degrees, and Guiding Principles.
- 12.3 In the case of the periodic review of postgraduate research degree provision delivered collaboratively, participants in the process should also refer to Annex 4, which contains the equivalent content as above but in respect of Partnerships.
- 12.4 The Guiding Principles are accompanied in the Code itself by practical advice which those responsible for undertaking the evaluation of their provision may also wish to consult as a further indication of the kinds of issues to be considered under the various headings of their report.
- 12.5 Further guidance and support may be obtained from the Standards and Enhancement Office or the Research and Doctoral Division, as appropriate.



## PERIODIC REVIEW OF POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH DEGREE PROVISION

<b>EVALUATIVE REPORT (typically 3,000 – 6,000 words) and ACTION PLAN</b>	
<b>Academic year of review:</b>	
<b>Review Area: The Subject(s), School(s) or equivalent or Off Campus Doctoral Centre(s) encompassed by this report:</b>	
<b>Research Coordinator(s) name(s)(s):</b>	<b>Contact email(s):</b>
<b>A. Action points addressed from previous periodic review report:</b>	
Provide an update on progress made against the actions agreed at the last periodic review (any previous action plan is to be updated and attached to this report). State if an action is 'incomplete', 'ongoing' or 'complete'. Where an action is either 'ongoing' or 'incomplete' the reasons for this should be clearly explained; such actions should be transferred to the appropriate section of the current action plan with a time-bound plan proposed in which to complete the action.	
<b>B. Performance Indicators</b>	
This section covers a number of measures of performance which you should have lodged in the Moodle PDR. You should provide an evaluation of this data, paying particular attention to overall satisfaction and to any non-completions, whatever the cause, along with reasons and remedies for any identified shortcomings as they relate to the relevant review area. The measures of performance are:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overall experience score(s) from PRES and/or other measures of student satisfaction.</li> <li>• Data on student cohort sizes, completions, failures, withdrawals and continuing numbers for the previous 5 years.</li> </ul>	
<b>C. Supervision</b>	
Provide an evaluation of supervisory arrangements for students, referring to your evidence in the Moodle PDR. Quantitative and/or qualitative data on this dimension are provided in the PRES report. Where performance is below relevant comparators and/or there is negative comment, this should be explored in your narrative and action proposed to help improve the position <b>from the perspective of the review area under consideration</b> . Where the score is above the comparators and/or there is positive comment, you should suggest <b>how your review area may have contributed to this</b> , so that your good practice can be shared across the institution. In writing the evaluation, you may find it helpful to consider some of the following points (this is not to be considered as an exclusive or exhaustive list):	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are clear criteria for how supervisors are appointed.</li> </ul>	

- Supervisors' capacity to deal with the numbers and types of students they are allocated is appropriate and monitored, bearing in mind the University's published regulations on supervisory workload allowances.
- Supervisors have relevant skills and knowledge, are fully trained and given opportunities to undertake relevant training and professional development.
- Supervisors understand and execute their responsibilities, including identifying, planning and fostering students' training and development, providing constructive feedback to help students direct their research activities, involvement in research progress monitoring, annual and mid-programme reviews and preparation for final assessment.
- Supervisors based in collaborative organisations are trained and understand their responsibilities.
- Supervisors know where to go if they need support/advice.
- Supervisory sessions take place (at least monthly) and are monitored in writing.
- A procedure is in place if the student-supervisor relationship breaks down.
- There are effective mechanisms in place to ensure minimum expectations are met regarding contact between research students and supervisory teams.
- Any themes relating to supervision, good or bad, that have emerged from student feedback and/or complaints or appeals.

#### **D. Resources**

- Provide an evaluation of the resources available to students, referring to your evidence in the Moodle PDR. Quantitative and/or qualitative data on this dimension are provided in the PRES report. Where performance is below relevant comparators and/or there is negative comment, this should be explored in your narrative and action proposed to help improve the position **from the perspective of the review area under consideration**. Where the score is above the comparators and/or there is positive comment, you should suggest **how your review area may have contributed to this**, so that your good practice can be shared across the institution. In writing the evaluation, you may find it helpful to consider some of the following points (this is not to be considered as an exclusive or exhaustive list):
- The working space available to students.
- Provision of adequate computing resources and facilities.
- Adequacy of library facilities (physical and online).
- Availability of specialist resources.

#### **E. Research culture/environment**

- Provide an evaluation of the research culture/environment, referring to your evidence in the Moodle PDR. Quantitative and/or qualitative data on this dimension are provided in the PRES report. Where performance is below relevant comparators and/or there is negative comment, this should be explored in your narrative and action proposed to help improve the position **from the perspective of the review area under consideration**. Where the score is above the comparators and/or there is positive comment, you should suggest **how your review area may have contributed to this**, so that your good practice can

be shared across the institution. In writing the evaluation, you may find it helpful to consider some of the following points (this is not to be considered as an exclusive or exhaustive list):

- How your research culture/environment allows for postgraduate researchers to access supportive peer networks to facilitate discussion of their research with other researchers, including research students.
- How your research culture/environment takes account of student diversity, health and well-being.
- How well your research culture/environment supports the engagement of research students in their discipline, internally and externally, and in their department or institution more broadly (for example, engaging in committees, or having opportunities to go to conferences).
- How your research culture/environment is informed by the feedback received from research students.
- How the research culture/environment serves to stimulate students and facilitate research achievement.

#### **F. Admissions, progress and assessment**

- Provide an evaluation of the admissions, progress monitoring and assessment processes, referring to your evidence in the Moodle PDR. Quantitative and/or qualitative data on this dimension are provided in the PRES report. Where performance is below relevant comparators and/or there is negative comment, this should be explored in your narrative and action proposed to help improve the position **from the perspective of the review area under consideration**. Where the score is above the comparators and/or there is positive comment, you should suggest **how your review area may have contributed to this**, so that your good practice can be shared across the institution. In writing the evaluation, you may find it helpful to consider some of the following points (this is not to be considered as an exclusive or exhaustive list):
- How admissions procedures conform to the requirements set out in the **Research Degree Regulations** and the **Code of Practice for Research Students and Supervisors**, particularly in regard to ensuring selectors are appropriately trained, at least two selectors are used to judge applications, interviews are conducted, and English language requirements are met.
- How applicants are guided through the admissions process.
- How an applicant's motivation, aptitude and potential to successfully complete the programme are taken into account.
- Induction and orientation for new students, including those who do not start in September/October.
- How you ensure that students understand progression monitoring procedures and deadlines.
- How you successfully monitor the individual and collective progress of students through the life cycle of their research degree, including the research proposal, research ethics matters, suspension and withdrawal.
- How effective your mechanisms are for identifying and implementing support for students who are not progressing satisfactorily.
- What criteria you have in place for the appointment of examiners.
- How you ensure that research degree examinations are consistent, equitable and fit for purpose.
- How you ensure that students understand the final assessment procedures for their degree and the standard required.

### G. Responsibilities

- Provide an evaluation of how students and others are made aware of their own and others' responsibilities, referring to your evidence in the Moodle PDR. Quantitative and/or qualitative data on this dimension are provided in the PRES report. Where performance is below relevant comparators and/or there is negative comment, this should be explored in your narrative and action proposed to help improve the position **from the perspective of the review area under consideration**. Where the score is above the comparators and/or there is positive comment, you should suggest **how your review area may have contributed to this**, so that your good practice can be shared across the institution. In writing the evaluation, you may find it helpful to consider some of the following points (this is not to be considered as an exclusive or exhaustive list):
- How the governance of research degrees functions in the review area, what committees, boards and individual responsibilities exist to manage and operate the provision, including admissions, progression, ethical considerations, examination, student representation.
- How and where the roles and responsibilities of research students, supervisors and examiners are made known.
- How students know that the University values and responds to their feedback.
- Student's understanding of their responsibilities as research degree students.
- Students' awareness of supervisors' responsibilities to them.
- The role of staff other than the supervisor in resolving any concerns students may have about their research degree programme.

### H. Research skills

- Provide an evaluation of the training available to students, referring to your evidence in the Moodle PDR. Quantitative and/or qualitative data on this dimension are provided in the PRES report. Where performance is below relevant comparators and/or there is negative comment, this should be explored in your narrative and action proposed to help improve the position **from the perspective of the review area under consideration**. Where the score is above the comparators and/or there is positive comment, you should suggest **how your review area may have contributed to this**, so that your good practice can be shared across the institution. In writing the evaluation, you may find it helpful to consider some of the following points (this is not to be considered as an exclusive or exhaustive list):
- Any taught elements in the programme(s) concerned.
- The development of skills and the acquisition of competencies through any placement-based learning.
- The effectiveness of other support and training available to students to develop research-related skills (this might include, for example, training in research methodologies, tools and techniques, research integrity (good research practice, pursuit of ethical research, transparency, attributing the contribution of others, research misconduct), intellectual property, communicating research).
- Feedback received from research students, Research Councils and other external funding bodies, and any other relevant stakeholders.

- Evidence of the development of students' confidence to be critically analytic and evaluative, creative or innovative.

#### **I. Professional development and opportunities**

- Provide an evaluation of professional development and other opportunities available to students, referring to your evidence in the Moodle PDR. Quantitative and/or qualitative data on this dimension are provided in the PRES report. Where performance is below relevant comparators and/or there is negative comment, this should be explored in your narrative and action proposed to help improve the position **from the perspective of the review area under consideration**. Where the score is above the comparators and/or there is positive comment, you should suggest **how your review area may have contributed to this**, so that your good practice can be shared across the institution. In writing the evaluation, you may find it helpful to consider some of the following points (this is not to be considered as an exclusive or exhaustive list):
- How professional development plans are established, reviewed and adhered to in order to address the individual needs of research students.
- Whether there are opportunities for postgraduate researchers to develop a range of research, and transferrable personal and professional-related skills to aid them in their future careers.
- The development of students' ability to manage projects, communicate information to diverse audiences, grow their contacts and professional networks, engage in placements and internships and manage their own professional development.
- Whether students are given the opportunity to undertake teaching or equivalent work, with relevant support, guidance and formal training.
- Careers guidance, advice and support for postgraduate career destinations.

#### **J. Wellbeing**

- Provide an evaluation of the pastoral support available to postgraduate research students which contributes to their wellbeing, referring to your evidence in the Moodle PDR. Quantitative and/or qualitative data on this dimension are provided in the PRES report. Where performance is below relevant comparators and/or there is negative comment, this should be explored in your narrative and action proposed to help improve the position **from the perspective of the review area under consideration**. Where the score is above the comparators and/or there is positive comment, you should suggest **how your review area may have contributed to this**, so that your good practice can be shared across the institution. In writing the evaluation, you may find it helpful to consider some of the following points (this is not to be considered as an exclusive or exhaustive list):
- How you actively determine whether students are satisfied with their own life and generally happy.
- What steps you take to address any concerns relating to student wellbeing.
- The effectiveness of the informal and formal pastoral support available to students who may be experiencing difficulties.

#### **K. Motivations, career intentions and preparedness, withdrawal indicators**

- Provide an evaluation of any quantitative and/or qualitative data you have that bears upon these matters, referring to your evidence in the Moodle PDR. Quantitative and/or qualitative data on these dimensions are provided in the PRES report. Where performance is below relevant comparators and/or there is negative comment, this should be explored in your



narrative and action proposed to help improve the position **from the perspective of the review area under consideration**. Where the score is above the comparators and/or there is positive comment, you should suggest **how your review area may have contributed to this**, so that your good practice can be shared across the institution. In writing the evaluation, you may find it helpful to consider some of the following points (this is not to be considered as an exclusive or exhaustive list):

- Whether the primary motivations and career intentions of pursuing a research degree have implications for the way your provision is delivered.
- How the main reasons given for considering leaving or suspending study might suggest changes to the way in which your provision is delivered.

#### **L. Provision of information to research students, staff and examiners**

Provide an evaluation of the effectiveness of the information and guidance available to students, staff and examiners, referring to your evidence in the Moodle PDR. In writing the evaluation, you may find it helpful to consider some of the following points (this is not to be considered as an exclusive or exhaustive list):

- Provision of information to students, including those who do not start in September/October.
- How and where the regulations and procedures, including the code of practice, research ethics and research conduct frameworks, are made clear and accessible, including provision of information to those students and staff based off-campus.
- How the diverse needs of research students are reflected in regulations and codes of practice.
- Whether there is appropriate supplementary information provided at review area level.
- Communication of the arrangements and requirements for progress monitoring, annual progress review and examination.
- Usefulness of handbooks and other guidance.
- Use of Moodle.

#### **M. Feedback**

Provide an evaluation, referring to your evidence in the Moodle PDR, of any themes that have emerged from feedback from:

- Students: This may comprise feedback gathered informally, through the end of year and interim progress reviews, PRES, postgraduate research student representatives etc.
- External Examiners: Comments on theses provided in External Examiners' reports for the relevant period.
- Other stakeholders: Feedback received from any other stakeholder, for example, collaborative organisations, sponsors, employers, placement supervisors etc.

#### **N. Collaborative provision**

Provide an evaluation of the effectiveness of the **additional** arrangements in place for any collaborative postgraduate research degree provision, referring to your evidence in the Moodle PDR. Collaboration can include arrangements with approved Doctoral Centres, with other organisations, or via students conducting their research in other organisations, placements etc. You may wish to consider the following :



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The use of agreements and contracts.</li> <li>• Management of supervisory arrangements.</li> <li>• Operation of administrative procedures.</li> <li>• Particular quality assurance arrangements in place to ensure a positive learning experience for the student.</li> <li>• Liaison between colleagues at both institutions.</li> <li>• Information and guidance on the expectations of collaborative organisations and individuals.</li> </ul>
<p><b>O. Action plan</b></p> <p>Provide an action plan (see below) to address any identified shortfalls in the provision. The action plan will consist of a series of targets that are <b>S</b>pecific, <b>M</b>easurable, <b>A</b>chievable, <b>R</b>ealistic and <b>T</b>ime-limited. Where possible, derive holistic, meaningful actions rather than a plethora of detailed ones. Aim for no more than a half dozen or so.</p>
<p><b>P. Request for support with actions</b></p> <p>Please flag in this section any actions that will require support from the wider University.</p>
<p><b>Q. Sign off</b></p> <p>Report author:</p>
<p><b>R. Approval</b></p> <p>This report has been approved by:</p> <p><b>Name:</b></p> <p><b>Post title:</b></p>

**ACTION PLAN FOLLOWING PERIODIC REVIEW OF POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH DEGREE PROVISION**

<b>Academic year of review:</b>		
<b>Subject(s), School(s), Centre(s), Institute(s) or Faculty covered by this report:</b>		
<b>Research Coordinator name:</b>	<b>Email:</b>	<b>Telephone:</b>

**Date of Action Plan:**

<p><b>Reference: A-Carried over from previous year's action plan; B-Current Performance Indicators; C-Supervision; D-Resources; E- Research Culture; F- Progression and assessment, including admissions; G-Responsibilities; H-Research skills; I- Professional development and opportunities; J- Wellbeing; K-Motivations, career intentions and preparedness, withdrawal indicators; L- Provision of information to research students, staff and examiners; M- Feedback; N- Collaborative provision.</b></p>				
Reference	Action	Date Due	Individual responsible	Progress ('complete', 'ongoing', or 'incomplete')



## PERIODIC REVIEW OF POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH DEGREE PROVISION

### PERIODIC REVIEW REPORT

*This document provides a template for the review panel report arising from a periodic review of postgraduate research degree provision. Its structure follows that of the evaluative report produced by the unit under review to inform the review process. Further prompts as to potential content are to be found in the template for the review and evaluation report and in Annexes 1 and 2 of this document. Although each panel member will normally be asked to focus on a number of specific areas from A-N, the final report should represent the panel's agreed synthesis of the written evidence and their discussions with students, supervisors and others.*

Name(s) of Faculty(ies)/ School(s)/Centre(s)/ Institute(s)/Subject(s) under review:	
Date of review event:	
Titles and names of panel members, with roles and affiliations:	
Titles and names and of staff and students interviewed by the panel, with roles and affiliations:	
Date of review report:	

#### **A. Progress with previous action plan**

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*Comment on the progress made with implementing the previous action plan.*

#### **B. Performance indicators**

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*Comment on student satisfaction, completion times and non-completions.*

#### **C. Supervision**

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*Comment on whether each student has an appropriately skilled and knowledgeable supervisory team, which includes a main supervisor as the key contact; whether*

*supervisors are provided with sufficient time, support and opportunities to develop and maintain their supervisory practice; whether supervisory contact is sufficient, recorded and subject to known procedures should the student-supervisor relationship break down.*

#### **D. Resources**

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*Comment on the availability and adequacy of library, computing and specialist resources.*

#### **E. Research Culture/Environment**

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*Comment on the suitability of the research environment; the interaction of students with peers to facilitate the existence of a research community; the suitability of research students' topics of research within research group settings; opportunities for research students to engage in peer support networks; support in developing student skills in research; access to development opportunities to contribute to the research's student ability to complete the programme successfully; advice on career development.*

#### **F. Admissions, progress and assessment**

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*Comment on whether students are admitted consistently and transparently in line with the requirements of the Research Degree Regulations and the Code of Practice for Research Students and Supervisors; whether students feel well-prepared for their programme of study; whether annual and stage progression monitoring processes are well-understood and effectively implemented; whether examination procedures are robust and the required standards understood and achieved.*

#### **G. Responsibilities**

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*Comment on the governance of postgraduate research degrees in the unit (s) of review (encompassing admissions, progression, ethical considerations, examination, student representation), and whether the various parties understand their own roles and responsibilities and those of others.*

#### **H. Research skills**

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*Comment on the suitability of research skills training in the review area to reflect students' academic needs analysis (encompassing: research methodologies, tools and techniques, research integrity (good research practice, pursuit of ethical research, transparency, attributing the contribution of others, research misconduct), intellectual property, communicating research); the assessment of training needs throughout the period of the research programme; the suitability of discipline-specific research skills training; the use of training provided centrally by the Research and Doctoral Division; the take-up and impact of training.*

#### **I. Professional development and opportunities**

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*Comment on the ways in which the review area plan for, implement and review students' professional development, (encompassing: managing projects,*

*communication, networking, employer links, teaching, careers guidance, advice and support).*

#### **J. Wellbeing**

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*Comment on the pastoral support available to postgraduate research students which contributes to their wellbeing.*

#### **K. Motivations, career intentions and preparedness, withdrawal indicators**

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*Comment on how students' motivations, career intentions and reasons for withdrawal influence delivery of the provision.*

#### **L. Provision of information to research students, staff and examiners**

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*Comment on the availability and effectiveness of the information and guidance available to students, staff and examiners, particularly at the level of the review area.*

#### **M. Feedback**

---

*Comment on the standard and quality of opportunities given to students, examiners and other stakeholders to provide feedback on their experience and response to it from the review area.*

#### **N. Collaborative provision**

---

*Comment on the effectiveness of the additional arrangements in place for any collaborative postgraduate research degree provision. Collaboration can include arrangements with approved Doctoral Centres, with other organisations, or via students conducting their research in other organisations, placements etc.*

#### **O. Action plan**

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*Comment on the provisional action plan provided as a result of the evaluative report.*

#### **P. Commendations**

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*Use this section to highlight areas of exceptionally good activity in the review area which should be shared with other parts of the University.*

#### **Q. Recommendations**

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*Use this section to highlight areas of improvement for the review area.*

## UK QUALITY CODE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

### Advice and Guidance

#### Research Degrees

##### **Expectations and Practices**

*The advice underneath the Expectations and Practices is not mandatory for providers but illustrative of a range of possible approaches.*

##### **Expectations for Standards**

1. The academic standards of courses meet the requirements of the relevant national qualifications framework.  
*This Expectation ensures that research degree-awarding bodies align their postgraduate awards with the relevant qualification framework.*
2. The value of qualifications awarded to students at the point of qualification and over time is in line with sector-recognised standards.  
*This Expectation ensures that research degrees awarded by providers continue to reflect sector-recognised standards such as the QAA Doctoral Degrees Characteristic Statement.*

##### **Core practice**

The provider ensures that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers.

*In practice, this means that the provision of a research environment conducive to learning and developing research combined with the provision of encouraging and supportive supervision, would improve opportunities for research students to achieve beyond the threshold level.*

##### **Common practice**

The provider reviews its core practices for standards regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.

*In practice, this means that research degrees form a distinct area of provision and therefore review and enhancement activity should be viewed across both in the context of provider practices, across all provision in order to consider any implications for research degrees and provider practices that only relate to research degrees.*

##### **Expectations for quality**

1. Courses are well-designed, provide a high-quality academic experience for all students and enable a student's achievement to be reliably assessed.  
*This Expectation relates to the provision of research supervision, environment, progression and examination of research degrees. Higher education providers have in place mechanisms for the monitoring and enhancement of the quality of their provision of research degrees that is both inclusive and supportive of students.*

2. From admission through to completion, all students are provided with the support that they need to succeed in and benefit from higher education.

*This Expectation encompasses the breadth of subject and supervisory expertise available to research students and the research environment, which will enable students to develop and generate new knowledge through exploration and learning of research.*

### Core Practices

- The provider designs and/or delivers high-quality courses.  
*In practice, this means that supervision of research students equates to the delivery of a course (albeit a programme of individual research) to ensure that the progress stages and support provided effectively contribute to the delivery and outcomes for research students.*
- Where the provider offers research degrees, it delivers these in appropriate and supportive research environments.  
*In practice, this means that supportive research environments and infrastructure serve to enable positive research outcomes through contextualising research, exposing research students to research culture skills, responding to research students' changing needs, and encouraging creativity, critical independent thought and originality of research outcomes.*
- The provider supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes.  
*In practice, this identifies the need to enable successful outcomes through the support infrastructure and contributing factors including regulatory frameworks, research environment, supervisory processes, research skills support, progress and review arrangements, and clarity of responsibilities.*

### **Guiding principles**

*The guiding principles given here are not mandatory for any provider. They are a concise expression of the fundamental practices of the higher education sector, based on the experience of a wide range of providers. They are intended as a framework for providers to consider when establishing new or looking at existing higher education provision. They are not exhaustive and there will be other ways for providers to meet their requirements.*

1. Provision of information is clear and accessible to research students and staff.  
*Providers that have research degree awarding powers have specific regulations and codes of practice for research degrees that are clear, regularly reviewed and accessible to research students and staff, including examiners. Responsibilities of research students and staff supervising, assessing and supporting research students are clearly communicated.*
2. The research environment is supportive and inclusive for all research students.  
*Providers accept research students into a sustainable, inclusive and supportive research environment for undertaking and learning about research throughout the*

*programme of study. The environment should support/facilitate research achievement, taking account of the diverse needs of research students.*

3. Supervisors are appropriately skilled and supported.

*Providers ensure that each student has an appropriately skilled and knowledgeable supervisory team, which includes a main supervisor as the key contact. Supervisors should be provided with sufficient time, support and opportunities to develop and maintain their supervisory practice.*

4. Research students are afforded opportunities for professional development.

*Providers ensure that research students are provided with appropriate opportunities to regularly reflect on and develop their personal, professional and research skills in consultation with their supervisory team.*

5. Progression monitoring is clearly defined and operated.

*Providers put in place clearly defined mechanisms for monitoring and supporting research student progress and outcomes from admission to successful completion, including formal and explicit reviews of progress at different stages.*

6. Higher education providers offer clear guidance and processes on assessment for research degrees.

*Providers, recognising the underpinning principles applicable to all assessment (see also Assessment Theme), operate robust and clear procedures for assessing research degrees, taking into account the UK qualification descriptors and characteristic statements.*



## UK QUALITY CODE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

### Advice and Guidance

#### Partnerships

##### **Expectations and Practices**

*The advice underneath the Expectations and Practices is not mandatory for providers but illustrative of a range of possible approaches.*

##### **Expectations for standards**

1. The academic standards of courses meet the requirements of the relevant national qualifications framework.
  - *When working in partnership, the awarding organisation retains responsibility for the academic standards of its awards, ensuring that the threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with the relevant national qualification frameworks.*
2. The value of qualifications awarded to students at the point of qualification and over time is in line with sector-recognised standards.
  - *When working in partnership, the awarding organisation retains responsibility for ensuring that academic standards at, and beyond, the threshold level are reasonably comparable with those achieved by other UK providers.*

##### **Core practice**

Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the standards of its awards are credible and secure irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them.

*In practice, this means that the awarding organisation must put in place all necessary measures to ensure that it can maintain the academic standards of its awards. This will include an analysis of the risks associated with a potential partner, the type of partnership that will be entered into, the management of the partnership (and its associated risks), that an appropriate formal agreement is put in place, and that these arrangements are effectively monitored and evaluated.*

##### **Expectations for quality**

1. Courses are well-designed, provide a high-quality academic experience for all students and enable a student's achievement to be reliably assessed.
  - *When working in partnership, the awarding organisation retains responsibility for ensuring that all aspects of the student's academic experience from admissions through to outcomes can be considered high quality. The awarding organisation is also responsible for ensuring that enhancement opportunities are available to students.*
2. From admission through to completion, all students are provided with the support that they need to succeed in and benefit from higher education.
  - *When working in partnership, the awarding organisation retains responsibility for ensuring that student needs are consistently met.*

## Core practice

Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the academic experience is high-quality irrespective of where or how courses are delivered and who delivers them.

*In practice, this means that where an awarding organisation arranges for all, or part, of the course to be delivered by another organisation, it puts in place effective processes for the management and oversight of all aspects of the students' academic experience to ensure that this is high-quality. These will include regular monitoring and review of the course(s), the teaching staff, the facilities, other resources and seeking, and acting on, where relevant, feedback from all involved in the provision with a particular focus on student feedback and outcomes.*

## **Guiding principles**

*The guiding principles given here are not mandatory for any provider. They are a concise expression of the fundamental practices of the higher education sector, based on the experience of a wide range of providers. They are intended as a framework for providers to consider when establishing new or looking at existing higher education provision. They are not exhaustive and there will be other ways for providers to meet their requirements.*

1. The awarding organisation will be accountable for assuring the overall quality and academic standards of the provision, regardless of the type of partnership.  
*An awarding organisation is accountable for the quality and academic standards of its provision irrespective of the partnership arrangements. Procedures, systems and safeguards implemented for the management of partnership arrangements should be in proportion to the level of risk to quality and academic standards posed by the arrangement.*
2. The awarding organisation will have in place appropriate governance to authorise and oversee the development and closure of partnership arrangements and to monitor their effective operation.  
*The awarding organisation will manage the development of partnerships to ensure that there is oversight of the partnership from inception through to closure. Formal procedures may set out requirements for differential arrangements dependent on the type of partnership and the level of risk. All aspects of a partnership should be subject to monitoring and evaluation to ensure their effective operation and to establish areas for development or the timely need for closure of the partnership.*
3. Due diligence enquiries are completed and legally binding written agreements are signed prior to the commencement of student registration - due diligence enquiries are refreshed periodically and before agreements are renewed.  
*The awarding organisation and, where relevant, the partner should conduct a range of due diligence enquiries appropriate to the type of partnership, the detailed arrangements and the identified level of risk. Legally-binding written agreements, where required, which set out the rights and obligations of all parties, should be finalised and signed before students register on the associated provision. Where relevant, the written agreements will include appropriate student protection plan (or equivalent) clauses.*

4. Provision delivered through partnership arrangements will be subject to quality procedures that are at least as rigorous, secure and open to scrutiny as those used for the provision delivered by the awarding organisation.  
*The partnership agreement will include information on the quality procedures for the provision, if, and how, they differ from those used for the provision delivered by the awarding organisation. They do not need to be the same procedures but they must be as rigorous, secure and open to scrutiny as those of the awarding organisation. There may be additional quality procedures and safeguards depending on the nature of the partnership and the level of risk identified.*
5. Awarding organisations that make arrangements for the delivery of learning opportunities with others, retain the authority and responsibility for awarding certificates and records of study in relation to student achievement.  
*The award of a UK higher education qualification is a highly-valued and much sought-after achievement; it is important that the award of certificates is protected and secure to ensure that this status can be maintained. Consequently, the awarding organisation will maintain records of study and achievement for students who achieve a qualification and will issue certificates to each individual student.*
6. All awarding organisations maintain accurate, up-to-date records of all partnership arrangements that are subject to a formal agreement.  
*The governance procedures will establish the types of partnership arrangements where a formal agreement will be required; this will normally depend on the level of risk to quality and academic standards posed by the arrangement. Records of the partnership arrangements should be maintained and kept up-to-date with any changes following review or evaluation of the partnership or other relevant changes, such as financial arrangements or change of key personnel.*
7. Awarding organisations monitor and evaluate their partnership arrangements to satisfy themselves that the arrangements are achieving their stated outcomes and that academic standards and quality are being maintained.  
*Awarding organisations will monitor and evaluate all aspects of their partnership arrangements on a continuous basis. This will include the contract between the partners (where this is required), due diligence data and the arrangements for delivery, assessment and student support (as appropriate to the partnership arrangement) to ensure that the student learning experience is of an appropriate quality and that published information/material is accurate.*

## INDICATIVE TIMESCALES AND RESPONSIBILITIES PRIOR TO REVIEW EVENT

Date	Action	Responsibility	Notes
Advance planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Confirm review areas for the year with the AVC(OfS) and ascertain the approximate number of students in scope for each area to inform planning</li> <li>Identify Review Panel Secretary and Review Panel Chair for the review and liaise accordingly</li> <li>Identify and recruit staff and student members for the Panel</li> <li>Brief Review Panel members and review area research management and research staff on the nature and scope of the Periodic Review process</li> <li>Hold planning meeting with Review Panel Chair and review area management. This meeting will agree, amongst other things, a schedule of key dates for the review and, based on the number of students in scope, sample sizes of required documentary evidence and staff and student attendees at the review event.</li> </ul>	Designated Officer in the Standards and Enhancement Office (with Review Panel Secretary, once identified)	In consultation with the Research and Doctoral Division, the Standards and Enhancement Office, Schools, the Students' Union and the Postgraduate Research Student Society, as appropriate
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Confirm agreed schedule of key dates, student numbers, evidence sample sizes and staff and student attendees at the review event to Review Panel members and Research Coordinator(s)</li> </ul>	Review Panel Secretary	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commence collation of documentation and data sets to support the evaluative report and action plan and the review process</li> </ul>	Research Coordinator(s)	Supported as appropriate by the Research and Doctoral Division and the Standards and Enhancement Office
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify potential external reviewer(s) and check their availability for the agreed window of dates</li> </ul>	Research Coordinator(s)	Designated Officer in the Standards and Enhancement Office to be consulted if more than one external reviewer is mooted

Six to three months before the review event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initiate the development of the evaluative report and action plan</li> <li>• Brief review area students on the Periodic Review process</li> <li>• Share draft evaluative report and action plan with students in the review area for their input</li> </ul>	Research Co-ordinator(s)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invite the proposed external reviewer(s) to take part in the Periodic Review</li> </ul>	Review Panel Secretary	
Two months before the review event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirm full membership of the Panel to the Chair and Research Coordinator(s)</li> <li>• Draft timetable for the review event</li> <li>• Send draft timetable to Chair and Research Coordinator(s) for comment</li> <li>• Liaise with Chair and Research Coordinator(s) to agree final timetable</li> </ul>	Review Panel Secretary	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Select a representative sample of review area staff and students to attend the panel meetings and notify/invite them</li> <li>• Record confirmation of attendance</li> <li>• Confirm names of staff and students attending the student meeting to the Review Panel Secretary</li> <li>• Upload the Evaluative Report and Action Plan, together with supporting evidence, to the Moodle PDR</li> </ul>	Research Coordinator(s)	

Six weeks before the review event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Audit the completeness of the documentation and evidence provided by the review area and inform the Research Coordinator accordingly</li> <li>• Alert members of the Panel to the PDR and any identified gaps/deficiencies</li> <li>• Inform Review Panel Members of their designated aspects of provision</li> <li>• Arrange venue and catering for the review event, as required, and inform Review Panel Members and Research Coordinator(s)</li> <li>• Circulate the final timetable for the review event to Review Panel Members and Research Coordinator(s)</li> </ul>	Review Panel Secretary	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forward preliminary comments on the review documentation and any requests for further information to be provided by the review area to the Review Panel Secretary</li> <li>• Develop questions for each session according to their designated aspects of provision</li> </ul>	Review Panel Members	
Three weeks before the review event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forward preliminary comments on the review documentation and any Review Panel requests for further information from the review area to the Research Coordinator(s)</li> </ul>	Review Panel Secretary	
At least one week before the review event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Upload response to comments and new information to the PDR and alert the Review Panel Secretary</li> </ul>	Research Coordinator(s)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alert the Review Panel to the response and new information</li> </ul>	Review Panel Secretary	

<b>PERIODIC QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW PROCESS FOR POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH</b>	
Policy ref:	
Version number	1.3
Version date	May 2023
Name of Developer/Reviewer	Dr Paul Birkett
Policy Owner (Group/Centre/Unit)	Standards and Enhancement Office
Person responsible for implementation (postholder)	Designated officer in the Standards and Enhancement Office
Approving committee/board	Education Committee
Date approved	
Effective from	September 2020
Dissemination method e.g. website	Website
Review frequency	Three-yearly
Reviewing committee	Education Committee
Consultation history (individuals/group consulted and dates)	Executive Dean, Research and Graduate School; Academic Registrar, Standards and Enhancement Office; Dean, Off Campus Division; Research Programmes Leader, Off Campus Division; Board of Studies for Research Degrees – 2019-20. Senior Officer, Standards and Enhancement Office - April 2023
Document history (e.g. rationale for and dates of previous amendments)	New as at May 2020. Minor technical, process, report compilation and clarifying amendments in August 2021, reflecting lessons learned from the pilot review during 2020-21. Minor clarifications and updating in August 2022 and May 2023.

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