

Periodic Review of Research Degree Provision

1. Introduction

1.1 At Staffordshire University all educational provision is subject to an in-depth periodic review normally once every six years. This procedure outlines the process by which Staffordshire University's research degrees are reviewed at institutional and School level by a Review Panel comprising members internal and external to the University. All other courses are reviewed in accordance with the procedure available at the following link:

http://www.staffs.ac.uk/assets/Periodic%20Review%20-%20Taught%20Courses_tcm44-92745.pdf

1.2 The purpose of the periodic review of research degree provision is:

- 1.2.1 To assure the quality and standard of the University's research degrees against internal and external reference points;
- 1.2.2 To enhance the University's research degree provision by identifying and sharing good practice and identifying areas for improvement;
- 1.2.3 To review and consider mechanisms for further enhancing the student experience;
- 1.2.4 To assess the effectiveness of the skills development programme offered to research degree students;
- 1.2.5 To assess the effectiveness of the University's development programme for research degree supervisors;
- 1.2.6 To ensure that effective mechanisms are in place for monitoring and supporting student progress; and
- 1.2.7 To support the strategic planning and development of research degree provision at the University.

1.3 The periodic review is conducted as a single, institution-wide event, normally once every six years. However, the panel will be presented with information which also enables review at School level and will meet with relevant staff and students from each School.

1.4 The review will cover all research degree programmes (including PhD by published work, research degrees validated by the University and the research stage of professional doctorate courses.

1.5 The University's Research and Innovation Committee is responsible for monitoring the effective operation of this procedure and reporting the outcomes to the University's Quality and Enhancement Committee. Research degree periodic reviews will be coordinated by the Quality Enhancement Service (QES) normally once every six years. The Chair of Quality and Enhancement Committee may however request that an earlier review be scheduled should concerns emerge.

1.6 This procedure has been developed with reference to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

2. Format of Review

2.1 The periodic review will be undertaken by a panel normally comprising:

- The Chair of the Research and Innovation Committee as Chair
- The Director of Research, Innovation and Impact Services
- At least two external academic panel members with expertise in the delivery and management of research degrees (to be nominated by the Head of the Graduate School) (see section 2.2 below).
- A recent graduate from a Staffordshire University research degree or if a graduate is not available a student in the later stages of their research degree.
- An officer from the QES who will act as secretary

2.2 Final approval of external panel members will be undertaken by QES (on behalf of Quality and Enhancement Committee) in consultation with the Chair of Quality and Enhancement Committee. Additional external subject specialists may be appointed to the panel as required.

2.3 The review exercise comprises consideration of a document submission by the individual members of the panel followed by a review event at the University, which will take place over 2 days.

3. **Scope of Review**

3.1 In reviewing the University's research degree provision, the Panel will give due regard to the following areas, which incorporate those covered by the University's Code of Practice for research degrees:

- 3.1.1 Recruitment
- 3.1.2 Induction
- 3.1.3 Information provided to students
- 3.1.4 Research Environment, including facilities
- 3.1.5 Social and Welfare Services
- 3.1.6 The Management of research degrees by the Schools and University
- 3.1.7 Research and Professional Training (including preparation for employment as appropriate)
- 3.1.8 Research Ethics, Research Integrity, Health and Safety
- 3.1.9 External Organisations (including Collaborating Establishments and placement opportunities)
- 3.1.10 Student Progress
- 3.1.11 Quality Assurance and Enhancement, including work to embed the University's Quality Enhancement Theme (where appropriate)
- 3.1.12 Student Engagement and the Student Voice
- 3.1.13 Examination
- 3.1.14 Complaints and Appeals

4. **Review Submission**

4.1 The review submission should be submitted electronically to the Quality Enhancement Service at least six weeks before the scheduled review event. The submission will be coordinated

by the Head of the Graduate School in consultation with a representative of each School at Staffordshire University, nominated by the Dean (the presenting team).

4.2 The review submission should include the items listed below. (It is recommended that the structure below is used when collating the submission.)

4.2.1 Scope of Review This is a brief introduction to research degree provision at the University/validated partner, outlining the portfolio of programmes; overall student numbers (by School (or other organisational structure as appropriate¹); and management/governance structures including the role of the Graduate School. This document should be prepared by the presenting team in consultation with the QES Officer as early as possible in the preparation of the review.

4.2.2 Self-evaluation document (SED):

An institutional Self-Evaluation Document, reflecting on the institution's research degree provision in the areas outlined in section 3 above and supported by/drawing on the supporting evidence outlined in section 4.2.3 (see below) and other documentation/data provided in the submission. Each section should both reflect on performance/adherence to the agreed Code of Practice over the last six years and outline planned enhancements.

Ideally live electronic links to the supporting evidence should be embedded in the SEDs.

A template for the Self-Evaluation Document is available from QES.

4.2.3 Supporting Evidence

4.2.3.1 A copy of the regulations governing research degrees at the University/validated partner and the Code of Practice.

4.2.3.2 Organisational charts relating to research, showing those staff responsible for the academic and pastoral support of research degree students at School and University level.

4.2.3.3 The Terms of Reference and Membership of the Graduate School Committee (or in the case of validated partners the equivalent committee) and Minutes of the meetings for the last 12 months.

4.2.3.4 Statistics for the previous six years (where available) by School, compared with institutional and sectorial trends as appropriate. Data to support the review will normally be supplied by Corporate Information working with the Graduate School / the validated partner and will usually include:

- Student applications
- Student enrolments – indicating the degree for which students are registered (MPhil; PhD; PhD by published work or Professional Doctorate); study mode (full or part-time; in attendance or by distance learning – or a combination of the two); and subject area.

¹ All references to 'School' in section 4.2 also refer to the equivalent organisational structures at validated partner institutions.

- The percentage of students who completed their progression milestones within the deadlines prescribed in the relevant regulations and pass rates (i.e. with or without conditions etc.) for those milestones. (A sample of anonymised progression reports from each School should also be provided.)
- Submission rates for full and part-time students
- Examination outcomes (for example, award, re-submission, award of lower qualification)
- Withdrawal and suspension rates
- Widening participation/equality and diversity data
- The number of appeals and complaints, the reasons for them and how many were upheld
- The number of cases of academic misconduct
- Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) results
- Employment destinations and career paths of students who have achieved a Staffordshire University research degree.

4.2.3.5 A list of current principal supervisors, by School (or other organisational structure as appropriate). A brief CV for each supervisor should also be made available.

4.2.3.6 Copies of School and University annual monitoring reports for research degree provision for the last six years, and the resulting action plans.

4.2.3.7 Current research degree student handbooks and any other information provided at induction.

4.2.3.8 The current schedule of researcher development sessions organised by the Graduate School/validated partner and student attendance records for the sessions held over the last 12 months.

4.2.3.9 Notes of School-level research student liaison groups held over the last 12 months.

4.2.3.10 Themes arising from comments made by external examiners for research degrees in the last 12 months. A sample of anonymised external examiner reports from each School should also be provided.

4.2.3.11 Details of any collaborating establishments, including student numbers (by School) and copies of the relevant agreements.

4.2.3.12 Access to the VLE for research degree students.

4.2.4 Student feedback for the Review Team

Current research degree students should be provided with the opportunity to provide a brief written statement for the panel, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the provision at the University/validated partner. A separate statement should normally be provided by students studying in each School. Each statement, which should normally be no more than two sides, should include details of how the information to inform the document was obtained.

5. **Review Meeting**

5.1 The review meeting will normally be held over 2 days. A template agenda for the review is attached at Appendix A. Panel members will be asked to submit initial comments on the documentation to the QES Officer three weeks in advance of the meeting. All initial comment forms will be circulated to the other panel members and the presenting team. Additional documentation may also be requested at this stage. The QES Officer will then work with the Chair of the Panel to finalise the meeting agenda, to be circulated ahead of the review meeting.

5.2 The review meeting will be an opportunity for the panel, using the SED as the core text (supported by the evidence outlined in 4.2.3 above) to come to an informed judgement with regard to the health of the research degree provision under consideration. The event will centre around a series of meetings with the presenting team to consider institutional-wide themes and issues. In addition, the review will include meetings with a selection of staff acting as supervisors and with a range of research degree students including student representatives. Students studying at a distance may be contacted by telephone during the meeting or submit comments prior to the event.

6. **Review Outcomes**

6.1 Following the meeting, a full report will be produced by the QES officer and agreed by the Panel. The presenting team will have the opportunity to comment on the factual accuracy of the report. Once any resulting queries are addressed the report will be considered at the Research and Innovation Committee and presented to Quality and Enhancement Committee (see section 6.5 below).

6.2 The University is keen to use the periodic review process as a means of highlighting and sharing examples of good practice. The Panel will therefore highlight any good practice identified as part of the review and make commendations as appropriate.

6.3 The report will also include an evaluation of Staffordshire University's/the validated partner's research degree provision – both at institutional level and by individual School – reflecting on the themes outlined in section 3 above. The panel will be required to confirm:

- Whether it has confidence with the academic standards of the research degree provision;
- Whether it is satisfied with the quality of students' learning opportunities in relation to (a) student support and supervision; (b) student achievement; and (c) learning resources; and
- Whether it is satisfied with the arrangements for quality assurance and mechanisms for quality enhancement.

In making its conclusions, the panel may differentiate some or all of its conclusions by School if appropriate.

6.4 The panel may also make essential recommendations (to be addressed by a date prescribed by the panel) and advisory recommendations (to be considered by the University/relevant School and addressed as appropriate). Recommendations may also relate either to the University as a whole or a specified School / Schools.

6.5 The review report will be considered by the Research and Innovation Committee and presented to Quality and Enhancement Committee. The Chair of the review panel will present the report. The Head of the Graduate School should also be present to contribute to the discussion.

7. **Review Follow-Up**

7.1 An action plan, outlining the action to be taken to respond to the recommendations arising from the review, should be submitted to the Chair of the review panel and QES Officer for approval, normally within a month of receipt of the final review report.

7.2 A formal follow-up report incorporating the action plan and outlining progress taken to date, should be considered by the Research and Innovation Committee and presented to Quality and Enhancement Committee six months after consideration of the Review Report, unless an earlier timeframe for reporting is determined by Quality and Enhancement Committee.