

## LTC15D009

Title: **Provision for the Degree of Master of Research (MRes)**  
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### Issue

Currently the University offers programmes in all four faculties that lead to the award of Master of Research (MRes). These MRes programmes are distinguished from the MA or MSc by Research by the fact they all contain significant taught elements in addition to a research project/dissertation. The requirement for the award of MRes varies between programmes and some programme specifications may not in keeping with recent QAA guidance. In addition there is no institutional view as to whether the MRes should be regarded as a taught programme or research degree or as to its strategic purpose.

### Recommendation

The PGR Executive and LTC are invited to accept the recommendations of the paper and note the proposed timetable for further work

### Resource Implications

The working group would require administrative support from either the PGR Service or LTS.

### Risk Implications

None

### Equality and Diversity

Offering structured pathways from undergraduate study to postgraduate research has the potential to open up the University's research degree programmes to both home/EU and international students from a wider range of backgrounds.

### Timing of decisions

The working group needs to report to LTC by January 2016 so that recommendations can be incorporated into the ESRC DTP bid (deadline 18 February 2016).

### Further Information

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Included below:

- Background and recommendation
- Summary of current MRes provision

## Background

Programmes leading to the degree of Master of Research (MRes) are increasingly seen across the sector as preparing graduates for entry to research degree programmes. The MRes is usually a research degree (using the HEFCE definition of >50% credit coming from the research element) that offers a structured pathway towards doctoral studies. Typically this would be through a significant research project (100 credits) and a defined menu of taught modules (80 credits) that provide a broad based training in research methodologies. Recent guidance from the QAA is consistent with this view:-

*“The Master of Research is a specialised or advanced study master's degree during which the student develops a deeper understanding of the core principles of research as well as the ability to conduct research. It is different from the Master by Research because the focus is on learning about research itself rather than studying a particular subject through research; programmes are usually orientated around structured learning”*

Adopting such a definition would clearly distinguish a UEA MRes from a MA or MSc by Research (a one year research degree with no taught elements) and a taught MA/MSc which is a terminal award typically consisting of 120 credits of advanced training and a 60 credit research project or dissertation.

Structured MRes programmes should play an important role both in building the University's research capacity and developing its employability strategy. For example:-

- UEA is currently developing a multi-million pound bid for an Economic and Social Research Council Doctoral Training Partnership (ESRC DTP) as part of a consortium of eight universities (Essex, Goldsmiths, Kent, Reading, Royal Holloway, Surrey, Sussex, UEA). It is probable that at least 40% of the studentships awarded will support combined 1 year MRes + 3 year PhD pathways.
- MBBS students can elect to interrupt their medical education to study for an MRes degree and gain a sound grounding in research that will support future applications for academic clinical fellowships that support clinicians studying for a PhD.
- Some international sponsors are prepared to provide four years funding for a structured 1+ 3 pathway.
- Providing an opportunity for UEA graduates to access a programme designed to prepare them admission to doctoral programmes at and beyond UEA. Not only does an MRes offer appropriate academic preparation for a research degree but it also may provide its graduates a competitive edge in funding competitions.

## Recommendation

That LTC establishes a working group jointly chaired by the ADRDP and ADTP to review the University's current provision for MRes degrees and consider how they might be developed to clarify and enhance the current PGT and PGR offers. The working group should specifically consider the following issues:-

- The structure of MRes programmes and in particular the balance between the taught elements and the research dissertation/project.
- Should the MRes be viewed as a research degree or taught programme and what are the consequences of that view?
- The role of MRes programmes in managing the transition from undergraduate study to postgraduate research.
- How the University might manage progression from MRes to PhD as part of a 1+3 offer at admission.
- Evaluate to what extent the development of MRes programmes that encompass a range of disciplines might replace multiple MA/MSc programmes that enroll small numbers of students.

## Summary of current MRes provision

In 2013/14 when these issues were first considered, there were 23 students enrolled on MRes courses. As of 7 October 2015 there were 70 students enrolled, of which 40 are new 2015/16 starters.

All of the 2015/16 entrants are enrolled on the MRes Clinical Science (programme: MEDPGMRES; 19 students), MRes Philosophy (programme: PPLPGMRES; 6 students) or MRes Social Science Research Methods (programme: PSYPGMRES; 15 students).

Both Academic Directors met with MRes course directors on 14 April 2014, and administrative managers have also held some short discussions. **At that point**, the view of the course directors was as follows.

### MRes Clinical Science

- they wanted to be in PGR two years ago
- get intercalating medical students to do some research, they have precisely 1 year and wanted them to get a Masters degree
- essentially wanted a 1yr PGR degree hence 100 credits plus 4 transferable skills courses
- were looking to MRC and Wellcome trust and thinking about a 4 year PhD degree course (1+3), this is a foot in the door
- intercalated year supports research as a way for doctors to specialise, supported by GMC, work towards a clinical fellowship eventually
- GMC prefer not to have compulsory intercalated years but in London intercalated years are becoming compulsory because of the competition to get places in teaching hospitals, here not so critical
- also links with future of MD
- Funding is tricky for intercalating medical students:
- Manchester runs a very successful intercalation programme for medical degrees; have managed to secure a higher level of HEFCE funding

### MRes Social Science Research Methods

- driver is DTC bids, and providing research methods training
- offered across 6 Schools, different pathways, currently make the pathways bespoke for each student, all involved except LAW
- MRes international development has been subsumed into this
- could be used as a part of a 1+3, provides a vehicle for this in Schools that don't have alternatives

### MRes Psychology

- have decided to call them MSc programmes for marketing reasons
- 80 credit dissertation

### MRes Computing Science

- wanted to have something in place for a 1+3 model
- gives an option for students who want to do something outside of the taught provision
- e.g. current student is doing directed study for elements that support the dissertation

### MRes Philosophy

- initial driver was towards 1+3
- introduced a completely different teaching structure
- Oxbridge tutorial system
- only cost-effective way of ensuring breadth of study options that we couldn't offer in a seminar format (would need at least 6 students)
- advantages include being able to prepare students from joint degrees for PhD study and catering for needs of overseas students in introducing students to the UK philosophy tradition
- MRes is PHI's main (only) Masters route
- typically 8-10 students
- would want marketing for students straight after a BA

- highlight difference between seminar (MA) and tutorial (MRes)
- In the MSc by Research, someone has a 1 year project that they know about, leading to publications, don't expect to see acquisition of new methods or gap filling
- Compare: MRes has a greater emphasis on filling gaps and extending students grasp of research methods, complementing a dissertation, breadth still key

Possible philosophy: MRes is a degree focused on researcher development rather than advanced training?

**MRes as stand alone**

- MRes label is helpful to highlight generic research skills
- increasingly, home students need to intercalate after a year after Masters in order to demonstrate that they have a distinction
- Progression to a PhD is one of a number of career choices

**Key overall issues are:**

1. What is the key purpose of each MRes; how does this relate to University/Faculty/School strategy; what is the target market; how do students fund their course?
2. Which Service should run the operational aspects of the course?
3. How might we make more of MRes recruitment to support PhD (or other doctoral) recruitment?
4. How can we standardise MRes structures in line with national quality assurance frameworks?