

Title: Report from the MRes Working Group
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Issue

The MRes Working Group met on 16 December 2015 and 18 January 2016, jointly chaired by the Academic Directors of Taught (Dr Adam Longcroft) and Research Degree (Dr Nick Watmough) Programmes and with support from the Postgraduate Research Service. It was set up by a resolution of Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC15D009; 21 October 2015 Minute 12) and is now reporting back to LTC on 16 March 2016 following discussion by the members of the Taught Programmes Policy Group (virtually) and Postgraduate Research Executive (on 3 February). Its membership, remit and some background are given at the end of this paper.

Currently the University offers a small number of programmes 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 be in keeping with recent QAA guidance. In addition there has been no institutional view as to whether the MRes should be regarded as a taught programme or research degree or as to its strategic purpose.

Recommendations from the MRes Working Group

1. Adopt a common structure for MRes programmes for entry from 2017/18, to be supported by dedicated MRes Award Regulations. Detailed consideration of this is being taken forward via the PGT Regulations Working Group. This would consist of 180 credits in total, split with a dissertation module of 100 credits (incorporating research training) and a taught element of 80 credits (4x20), primarily focused on advanced skills training.

Notes: This fits with the existing MRes Clinical Sciences structure. The course directors of the MRes Philosophy and MRes Social Science Research Methods have confirmed that it would be possible to make changes so that these courses also complied with this structure.

2. The above structure would mean that the MRes is a research degree according to HEFCE categories (at least 50% of the programme is research), and should be returned to HESA according to this categorisation (L00 rather than M00). However, the University may still wish to consider it as a PGT degree for the purposes of administration.
3. MRes programmes should be marketed as having been designed to provide a good route to doctoral study, but are not the only appropriate route. The advantages of MRes programmes are that students gain significant experience of research, being supervised, and time management.
4. The administration for Research Council doctoral training pathways which involve a Master's component should follow option 2 from the attached table of options. MRes (and certain other) course directors should note the need to be aware of Research Council steers of types of research training to be provided in order for courses to be compliant as part of 1+3 pathways.

5. Faculties should consider the role of MRes programmes in reviews of Masters provision, for example if they may be a helpful way to replace multiple MA or MSc pathways, and/or to encourage more students to see if they are interested in progression to a doctoral research track. Faculties may also wish to consider whether it is helpful to have MRes programmes advertised as part of PGR campaigns: e.g. this is likely to be advisable with ESRC DTP funding. If so, this should be discussed with Faculty Marketing Managers and the PGR Service.

Resource Implications

Resource implications for administration are covered in the table overleaf. Re-categorisation of MRes programmes from M00 to L00 would currently allow funding for supervision to be provided through RDP funding to cover supervision time, rather than via the HEFCE block grant (where applicable) and this is likely to result in a small net gain of funding to Schools running MRes programmes.

Risk Implications

The recommendations in this paper should reduce risk around potential inconsistency of student experience on MRes programmes and clarify the University's strategic goals with respect to the role of MRes programmes.

Equality and Diversity

Full account should be taken of part-time MRes students when re-designing any course structures. The Working Group believes this can be done appropriately without much difficulty.

Timing of decisions

This paper will be noted by the PGT Regulations Working Group in January 2015, by PGR Executive on 3 February 2016, by the members of the Taught Programmes Policy Group during February 2016 and then will be put to Learning and Teaching Committee on 16 March 2016.

Further Information

Please contact the relevant Academic Director or Dr Vivien Easson (x1835, v.easson@uea.ac.uk).

Administrative options – analysis for draft report for MRes working group

Option	What this would involve
1: Status quo	<p>ARM continue to handle all PGT admissions and LTS handle all PGT lifecycle</p> <p>ARM and LTS teams would need to be trained and involved in ESRC DTP funding and lifecycle administration to support 1+3 funding streams and training needs analysis. There would be workload implications for ARM and LTS. Probably less well able to support 1+3 DTP-funded students throughout the course of their programme or to be flexible to compete with other institutions within the expected ESRC-funded social sciences DTP.</p>
2: Status quo but with DTP administration in PGR Service (recommended)	<p>ARM continue to handle all PGT admissions and LTS handle all PGT lifecycle, but PGR Service handle the additional DTP administration in managing studentship allocation and supplementary training needs analysis.</p> <p>This would play to each team's strengths and avoid the need for additional training or workload in ARM/LTS, but would require some collaboration of the relevant teams with a PGR administrator to ensure that deadlines and targets are met successfully and that programmes comply with ESRC requirements. The additional administration in PGR Service could be included in the role of an administrator supporting the ESRC DTP, which PGR will be requesting anyway.</p>
3: Moving admissions for certain PGT programmes to PGR Service	<p>For example, the MRes Social Science Research Methods admissions could move from ARM to PGR. It would not be possible to move all admissions for all possible 1+3 pathways to PGR, so this would only be done if there were other advantages from the switch – e.g. to market the MRes more specifically as a pathway primarily for PGR recruitment.</p> <p>Care would need to be taken to ensure that information was passed to LTS at similar times and in similar ways to that for other Masters' programmes.</p>
4: Move MRes programmes to PGR Service	<p>All MRes programme administration could move from ARM/LTS to PGR. It would not be possible to move all admissions for all possible 1+3 pathways to PGR, so this would only be done if there were other advantages from the switch – e.g. to re-define MRes programmes explicitly as research degrees and/or to align the procedures with allocating dissertation supervisors for those already in place for PhDs and professional doctorates in PGR.</p> <p>The main operational difficulty with this would be that most MRes students currently take modules which are also on MA/MSc programmes, so timetabling of teaching and examinations would become more complex. The PGR Service already runs Boards of Examiners but this would add significant administrative complexity as long as modules are shared across Masters programmes.</p>

Membership of the MRes Working Group

- Dr Laura Biggart, Course Director, MRes Social Science Research Methods
- Dr Kenda Crozier, Associate Dean (PGR), Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences
- Dr Vivien Easson, Head of Postgraduate Research Service (Secretary)
- Dr Yann Lebeau, Associate Dean (PGR), Faculty of Social Sciences
- Dr Adam Longcroft, Academic Director of Taught Degree Programmes (joint Chair)
- Dr Clive Matthews, Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching), Faculty of Arts and Humanities
- Liam McCafferty, UEA Student Union Postgraduate Education Officer
- Professor Catherine Rowett, Course Director, MRes Philosophy
- Caroline Sauverin, Head of Learning and Teaching Services
- Dr Kevin Tyler, Course Director, MRes Clinical Science
- Dr Nick Watmough, Academic Director of Research Degree Programmes (joint Chair)

Remit

The main duties of the MRes-WG are to review and comment on the following issues:

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

Background

The MRes regulations are currently part of the Common Masters Framework, with admissions being administered by ARM and lifecycle administered by LTS. There are currently 61 students enrolled on MRes programmes, split as 21 MED, 9 PPL (Philosophy) and 31 PSY (Social Science Research Methods). Of these, 49 are full-time and 12 are part-time.

The University is currently involved in bid preparation for a multi-million pound bid for funding to the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) as part of a 10-university consortium led by the University of Essex. UEA leads for this are Dr Lebeau and Dr Easson, who are members of the consortium bid steering group. We expect that at least 40% of the funding (if the bid is successful) will be available for 1+3 studentships, providing Master's funding as well as PhD funding. The MRes Social Science Research Methods would be an obvious source of the Master's part, but we need to ensure it fits with ESRC postgraduate training guidelines. The bid deadline was 18 February 2016 and the first cohort of students would be in 2017-18.

According to background work done in April 2014 by the two Academic Directors, all MRes programmes at UEA were originally designed to provide recruitment pathways into doctoral-level research in their respective disciplines.

This review has some areas of common interest with the ongoing review of Masters courses in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, and with the PGT Regulations Working Group looking at the New Academic Model for PGT courses.