

LTC09D143

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Author: Melanie Steele
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A report on matters under consideration by the Postgraduate Research Programmes Policy Group

The Policy Group met last on Friday 23rd April 2010. In addition an Extraordinary meeting was held on Monday 17th May 2010 to discuss PGR Skills Training for 2010-11. The notes that follow summarise the position reached by the Policy Group.

1. Electronic thesis submission

The change of policy to permit candidates the option of either submitting two hard-bound copies or one hard-bound and one electronic copy took effect from 1st April 2010. The PGR Managers Group discussed the operational issues at their meeting in March 2010, and a number of amendments were made to the Research Degree Entry Form.

The Policy Group confirmed Chair's action in approving the revisions to the Rules for the Consultation and Borrowing of Theses (Calendar p462) following further discussions with the Library. These rules also form part of Section 3: Submission, Presentation, Consultation and Borrowing of Theses (pages 8-16) in the Research Degrees Policy Documents. See Appendix A.

It was also agreed that the number of copies of the abstract to be provided could be reduced from five to three, since the Library no longer required three copies of the abstract. This would require a minor amendment to the Rules for the Submission of Work for Higher Degrees.

2. Examiners Report forms

The Examiners report forms for the PhD, MPhil and Research Masters have been updated to bring the forms in line with the Regulations and Instructions to Examiners for these degrees. The Policy Group confirmed Chair's action for the removal of question 5 from the Examiners Report form for the MSc by Research, due to the perceived inconsistency with the Regulations for that degree. Question 5 read "Does the thesis represent a significant contribution to learning and contain matter worthy of publication? (The thesis itself need not be submitted in a form suitable for publication.)"

2. PGR Training

(a) PGR Skills Training Steering Group

The Policy Group received a report from the PGR Skills Training Steering Group which had met on 20 April 2010. Feedback received from students regarding the 2009-10 training programmes had been good and plans were well advanced for next year's programmes. It was agreed that with skills training being increasingly devolved to Faculties that it would be

appropriate for the number of Skills Training Steering Group meetings per year to be reduced from four to two (one in November, one in April/May).

(b) Formalising expectations for PGR training within the Code of Practice for Research Degrees and Regulations.

At present the Code of Practice: Research Degrees does not include details regarding the University's expectations regarding undertaking skills training and each Faculty sets out its own requirements for training, although PhD students take a total of 30 training credits of transferable personal and professional development training over their period of study at UEA (each training credit being typically one day of training).

The recent statement made by Research Councils UK on the 'Sustainability of the Researcher Development Agenda' <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/cmsweb/downloads/rcuk/international/statementofexpectations.pdf> includes the expectation that institutions will "fully embed researcher development into the normal processes in the research and training environment." It is important that expectations regarding skills training are formalised within the Code of Practice.

Proposals for revisions to the Code of Practice

i. Key Principles for Research Degree Supervision (page 4)

It is proposed that an additional principle is added to the key principles as follows:

- All students will undertake Skills and Employability training as specified by their Faculty, Graduate School or Institute.

ii. Section 7 Supervision vii) Guidance and Feedback (page 17)

It is proposed to amend this section as follows:

"The primary supervisor should arrange a meeting with the student to establish the working relationship within three weeks of registration. This should include agreeing responsibilities and expectations as well as clarifying critical activities and dates. The student is the person responsible for conducting the research and writing the thesis. The primary supervisor and other members of the supervisory team are expected to offer advice and guidance regularly, *and to discuss the skills and employability training courses that the student should attend.*

Formal feedback from students on the supervisory process and other aspects of the degree programme is incorporated within the Annual Review of Students' Progress. Comments from students on feedback will be monitored by the School as part of the annual review of monitoring reports."

iii. Skills and Employability Training

It is proposed that an additional section is inserted after Section 7 Supervision page 17 – Paragraph 8 Skills and Employability Training:

The University is committed to the provision of skills and employability training for all postgraduate research students, taking into account national standards including the Roberts 'Set for Success Report' and the expectations of Research Councils UK. All students are expected to actively participate in the training programmes as specified by their Faculties, Graduate Schools or Institutes, and supervisors are expected to support their students in developing their personal skills and employability.

(c) Skills training and Roberts funding 2010-11

Next year will see the final confirmed Roberts funding payment covering the period 1 October 2010 to 31 March 2011. The framework and timetable for RCUK's transition arrangements will be finalised in summer 2010. In response to the withdrawal of Roberts funding the Faculties are planning to deliver their programmes substantially from within each Faculty and are seeking resources (staffing and non-staffing) in order to achieve this.

During March and April 2010 meetings were held with each Faculty Associate Dean and PGR Manager as well as the Chairs of the Institute Graduate Studies Committees to discuss a number of issues relating to PGR training and to report back to the Extraordinary Policy Group meeting on 17 May 2010.

It was agreed that Faculty Associate Deans would map training courses available across the University with a view to identifying any gaps and to determine the training required from CSED. This exercise would be completed within a month.

The following principles were endorsed at the meeting:

- That there must be equality of opportunity for research students, regardless of funding source.
- That the PGR training programmes offered by the four Faculties would be available to all PGR students, subject to any restrictions on numbers or the availability of accommodation.
- That no courses would be made compulsory at University level but Faculties/Institutes could choose to make certain courses mandatory.
- It was recommended that a Training Officer be appointed in each of the Faculties to deliver and administer training programmes.
- Research students should have the same access to careers guidance and training as taught students. (It was noted that currently PGR careers guidance was supported by Roberts funding).
- That when research students are teaching they are staff and funding for training should be made available from School and staff development budgets. The Teaching Skills course is currently largely supported by Roberts funding.

3. Thesis format

The Policy Group considered further to the last meeting on 22 January 2010 whether to support the development of guidelines for submission of a series of publications as part of the thesis.

There was no support for developing an 'alternative thesis format'. The Policy Group reiterated the need to ensure the primacy of the University's examination process and of its appointed examiners in determining and judging the quality and standard of the thesis. Examiners must be able to criticise the content, analysis, discussion of conclusions of any material submitted for a UEA PhD, to require clarification, correction of errors, further analysis/experimentation, correction of errors, and to be able to fail, require resubmission or any of the other options listed on the examination report form, irrespective of whether the material has been through peer-review.

There is clear evidence from external examiners reports that a small number of UEA research degree students are submitting publications as a substantial part of their thesis. The Policy Group agreed that whilst they did not wish to discourage PhD students from publishing that further guidance was necessary for both candidates and supervisors of what is acceptable to the University. Further guidelines - to be included in the Code of Practice and Section 3 of the

Research Degree Policy Documents 'Submission, Presentation, Consultation and Borrowing of Theses'- would be considered at the next Policy Group meeting.

8. Revisions to the Doctor of Education Regulations

The Policy Group considered proposals for revisions to the EdD Regulations, following a review by the School of the changes made in 2008 and discussions with the current External Examiners. The proposed changes would also bring the programme more in line with other high quality EdD programmes in the UK.

The Policy Group endorsed in principle to the proposed changes, subject to consideration of an amended word length for the MEd thesis. Draft revised Regulations and Instructions to Examiners would be drawn up and considered at the next Policy Group meeting.

The proposals are:

- To revert to the pre-2008 thesis word length of 60,000 words (the current thesis length is 80,000 words).
- For students to initially register on the MEd with the option after the taught stage, either to complete the MEd or transfer to the EdD.
The transfer to EdD would involve:
 - passing all the assignments and
 - by submitting an appropriate proposal.
 This would allow a route, with a shorter dissertation, to MEd as a positive option.
- Proposed Assessment / Progression Structure: 2010 intake

Year One		Words
Assignment One	Critical analysis	3500
Assignment Two	Methodology (comparative)	6500
Year Two (1 st half)	Proposal	5000

EdD transfer / entry to thesis stage on submission of appropriate proposal or M level exit route by addition of 20,000 word dissertation. The proposal will also be reviewed by the Research Ethics Committee and approved before the study can commence.

Year Two (2nd half onwards) – end Year Four

Thesis Stage

Formative assignments will become integral to the course, a course requirement but not formally assessed by an Examination Board.

End of Year Two		
Formative Assignment 1	Literature Review	6000
Year Three (1 st half)		
Formative Assignment 2	Methodology (focused)	6000
Year Three (2 nd half)		
Formative Assignment 3	Issues emerging from the data	6000
End of Year Four		
Thesis (incorporating the 3 formative assignments)		60,000

- The options of minor corrections of an academic nature (three months) and limited corrections of a presentational nature (six weeks) to be added to the examiners' recommendations following the viva. Currently the EdD regulations only allow the recommendation of minor corrections (one month) or resubmission (one year) for work requiring revision to meet the standards for the EdD.

Appendix A

Consultation and Borrowing of Theses page 462 Calendar

If a candidate for a Research Degree is approved for the award of the degree, one copy (either hard copy or electronic) of the thesis is deposited in the University Library where it shall be available for consultation and/or copying in the manner described in the following paragraph. The second copy is deposited with the School of Studies concerned.

Theses deposited in the University Library cannot be removed from the Library. However, copies may be taken, normally in one of the following ways:

- (1) By the British Library Document Supply Centre which may make a digital copy of UEA PhD theses available for download via EThOS, the British Library's E-theses initiative.
- (2) By the University Library which will make theses available for reference use in the Library.

All copies made in accordance with the above provisions will include the title page of the thesis which should include a statement protecting the author's copyright (See Rules for the Form of Theses and Dissertations Regulation 1(3).)

In particular cases where the original is sought, the University Library passes on inter-library loan requests to the School of Studies concerned. Hard-bound copies of theses deposited in the University Library are never lent to other libraries.

The Board of the School, at the request of the author, may determine that a particular thesis shall, for a period of up to three years specified by the Board, be available only to the author or to those who have written permission to consult it. A candidate wishing to apply for a consultation restriction to be placed on his thesis should apply for the appropriate form from the Registry. The completed form must accompany the copies of the thesis, when submitted. Theses whose use is restricted in this way are not sent to the British Library Document Supply Centre either in electronic format or for digitisation by EThOS and are not made available for copying in other ways until the restriction has lapsed.