

UNIVERSITY OF EAST ANGLIA

DRAFT RESPONSE TO QAA CONSULTATION (QUESTIONNAIRE) ON UK QUALITY CODE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION CHAPTER 11: RESEARCH DEGREES, JANUARY, 2012.

Starting at Q5 (**Qs 1-4 cover institutional name and role**), here are our suggested responses. (Please refer to the questions in the consultation document E circulated for the PGRPPG meeting on 6 February)

5. The title for this Chapter is different from that used for the Code of Practice, Section 1 (which this Chapter will replace). Is the proposed new title appropriate?

Q5 Yes

It would be useful to understand the rationale for the change from programmes to degrees. The previous title suggested that the focus was on the student academic experience – the purpose of the various sections of the Code; the reference to ‘degrees’ might suggest that the focus is on standards, which is more appropriately the focus of the qualifications framework. That said, we do not object to the revised title.

6. Is the remit of the Chapter appropriate and clearly stated?

Q6 Yes.

We have concerns about some of the statements which appear to us to be contradictory. These are:

P1 the Expectation: P1: the last sentence of paragraph 3 appears somewhat at odds with the first sentence of the next paragraph which states that the Indicators are not designed to be used as a checklist.

Pp2 and 3 usefully give an overview of the different reference points for research degrees; it would be helpful to be clear in the introduction about the status of these documents in relation to this chapter of the Quality Code and what import these have in Institutional Review.

7. Is the Chapter sensitive to the diversity of higher education providers and higher education students?

Q7 No

The Chapter is sensitive to the diversity of HE students but it is less clear where sensitivity is demonstrated with regard to the diversity of HE providers, except for the constant repetition throughout as to whether the Expectations are relevant to all UK HE providers. We are

strongly of the view that there should be no differential treatment. Expectations should be applicable to all UK HE providers. Differential expectations would have major implications for the academic experience of PGR students – which would seem to us to undermine the point and purpose of the Chapter – and introduce unacceptable differences for institutions when it comes to institutional review.

8. Does the Chapter adequately take account of the diversity of research degrees available in the UK?

Q8 Yes

9. Is the tone and style of this Chapter appropriate?

Q9 Yes

10. Are there any aspects of enhancement that you would like to see featured more prominently in this Chapter?

Q10 Yes

Enhancement as a theme did not come across strongly in the draft - unless this is represented by the text boxes in the comments section. If the latter, it would be helpful to say so. It would also be helpful to have a comment about the implications of enhancement in an institutional review.

11. Would this Chapter as written be useful to you? If not, what other changes might be needed?

Q11 Yes

12. Has the Chapter been adequately updated to reflect changes in the context since Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes was last reviewed in 2004?

Q12 Yes

13. Do you agree with the wording of the Expectation for this Chapter?

Q13 No

Providers cannot guarantee to meet successful academic and personal outcomes of research degrees. The academic outcome is a matter for the examiners and personal outcomes can be multitudinous, inappropriate and unrealistic. We suggest that this is rephrased as follows: '...an appropriate infrastructure which offers students the support and resources they need to help achieve successful academic and personal outcomes of their research degrees.'

14. Is this Expectation applicable to all providers of UK higher education?

Q14 Yes

Why should the definition not be applicable to all providers of UK HE? To have different expectations about the same area would not represent a level playing field when it comes to institutional review and would result in different PGR student experiences. We consider consistency of application to be critical.

15. Do you agree with the wording of these Indicators?

Q15 Yes

16. Are these Indicators applicable to all providers of UK higher education?

Q16 Yes

17. Should we include any additional links or points of reference under these Indicators?

Q17 No

18. Do you agree with the wording of this Indicator?

Q18 No

We have concerns about the reference to 'excellent' research and the lack of definition. We do not believe that it is the role of the Agency to inquire into the excellence or otherwise of research (that is a matter for the REF). Some institutions may find that this wording would limit their ability to recruit PGR students. Others may have excellent research in some areas but not in others.

Turning to the factors listed as indicators of excellence, what is meant by 'sufficient' numbers of staff? Who determines this and on what criteria?

The references to the Vitae Researcher Development Statement and the Researcher Development Framework need clarification in terms of their status in this Chapter.

The reference on p8 to the recognition of the 'distinctive' nature of research degree study could usefully be illustrated.

19. Is this Indicator applicable to all providers of UK higher education?

Q19 Yes

20. Should we include any additional links or points of reference under this Indicator?

Q20 No

21. Do you agree with the wording of these Indicators?

Q21 No

(**FOR UEA only:** NB Indicator requires at least two selectors involved in admissions decisions who have had training. We cannot easily say no to this – but implications? We might seek an amendment to the wording that says that 'at least one of whom has received training etc or we could replace 'and' by 'or' in 'received training, advice **OR** guidance).

The meaning of the comment at the top of page 11 is somewhat obscure and assumes a particular organisational arrangement that is not necessarily applicable to all Universities. Suggest either deletion or a rephrase: 'providers should provide clear guidance on the balance of responsibilities between staff in local units and PGR administrative support.

Clarify the meaning of 'social environment' in Indicator 8. As this is an indicator it is significant and we should be clear what this involves/does not involve.

22. Are these Indicators applicable to all providers of UK higher education?

Q22 Yes

23. Should we include any additional links or points of reference under these Indicators?

Q23 No

24. Do you agree with the wording of these Indicators?

Q24 Yes

NB The text box on p15 requires definition of 'accessibility' since, as currently written, it could imply accessible at all times.

25. Are these Indicators applicable to all providers of UK higher education?

Q25 Yes

26. Should we include any additional links or points of reference under these Indicators?

Q26 No

27. Do you agree with the wording of this Indicator?

Q27 Yes

Pp17 -18: there is a possible discrepancy in the advice about the constitution of a review panel: p17 implies that the process should involve individuals independent of the supervisor(s) and the student; p18 refers to the inclusion of the supervisor and 'some' members who are independent. This would benefit from clearer wording.

28. Is this Indicator applicable to all providers of UK higher education?

Q28 Yes

29. Should we include any additional links or points of reference under this Indicator?

Q29 No

30. Do you agree with the wording of these Indicators?

Q30 No

Indicator 14: Suggest more flexible timing for the initial assessment of development needs as follows: '...initially during the student's induction period or within the first four weeks '

(FOR UEA only : Indicator 15: do we do this? We record skills training credits but to what extent is this a means by which students can record and reflect on their personal development?)

31. Are these Indicators applicable to all providers of UK higher education?

Q31 Yes

32. Should we include any additional links or points of reference under these Indicators?

Q32 No

33. Do you agree with the wording of this Indicator?

Q33 Yes

(Note: reference to PTES not relevant in this document)

34. Is this Indicator applicable to all providers of UK higher education?

Q34 Yes

Reference to 'research administrators' in the group of people who might be invited to provide feedback has a different connotation at UEA. Suggest the term be re-phrased: PGR administrative support staff

(**FOR UEA only:** note the expectation that the views of recent research degree graduates plus sponsors, employers and where, possible, alumni, inter alia, are obtained on an annual basis. We probably do some but not all this).

35. Should we include any additional links or points of reference under this Indicator?

Q35 No

36. Do you agree with the wording of these Indicators?

Q36 Yes

(**FOR UEA only:** note the text box on p22 which throws out a challenge about how we would find ways of assuring fairness and consistency, acceptable to the student, that enable them to know the viva is conducted in an appropriate manner, if there is no independent chair).

37. Are these Indicators applicable to all providers of UK higher education?

Q37 Yes

38. Should we include any additional links or points of reference under these Indicators? Q38 No

39. Do you agree with the wording of these Indicators?

Q39 Yes

Guidance to Indicator 20: the last paragraph states that it is 'essential' that providers appoint an impartial person(s)..to whom students can take their complaints and whose role is widely publicised.' It is inappropriate to use terms such as 'essential' in a section which is meant to be for guidance.

40. Are these Indicators applicable to all providers of UK higher education?

Q40 Yes

41. Should we include any additional links or points of reference under these Indicators?

Q41 No

42. Should we include any additional Indicators in this Chapter?

Q42 No

43. Please use this space for any further comments on the Chapter. There is no word limit for this question.

Q43 None

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01 March 2012