



University of  
Staffordshire

# PERIODIC REVIEW OF RESEARCH DEGREE PROVISION POLICY & PROCEDURE

September 2024



## Periodic Review of Research Degree Provision - Policy and Procedure

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 At University of Staffordshire all educational provision is subject to an in-depth periodic review normally once every six years. This procedure outlines the process by which University of Staffordshire'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](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 review the university's approach to managing and assuring the academic quality and standard of its research degree provision in line with internal regulations, policies and guidance, and the requirements set out externally by bodies including the Office for Students, The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, and research funders' expectations.
- 1.2.2 To recognise and share good practice in research degree provision, identifying mechanisms for its future development.
- 1.2.3 To review the doctoral student experience and to consider mechanisms for enhancing this including consideration of the research environment, resources and opportunities available to research students.
- 1.2.4 To consider the effectiveness and uptake of the professional development provision offered to research degree students and their supervisors.
- 1.2.5 To review the outcomes of and mechanisms used to monitor and evaluate research degree student's progression, completion, and experience and how these are used to inform School and institutional support for PGRs.
- 1.2.6 To support the future 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 (such as PGR leads, doctoral supervisors and professional doctorate course leads) 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 Innovation and Enterprise 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 AQS 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:

- A senior member of the University (normally a Pro-vice chancellor) as Chair. The Chair should not have responsibility for overseeing the university's research portfolio.
- The Deans from each School
- Two external academic panel members with expertise in the delivery and management of research degrees
- One external panel member who could be an employer or representatives from a non-academic organisation involved in collaborative doctoral provision.
- Up to two PGR alumni who are representative of the PGR demographic, modes of study and research degrees offered.
- Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement (or nominee)
- A member of QAE who will act as Review Secretary.

2.2 The Director of Research and Postgraduate Research will fulfil the role of Review Lead. In consultation with relevant members of the Research Degrees Committee, they should nominate appropriate external and PGR alumni panel members.

2.3 Final approval of external panel members will be undertaken by QAE (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.

2.4 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 normally take place over 1-2 day. The requirements of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies may be taken into account, particularly in relation to Professional Doctorate Provision, in order to avoid where possible duplication between PSRB and internal review processes.

2.5 Periodic review event dates should normally be agreed in the academic year preceding the year of the review.

2.6 In the academic year preceding the Review the Quality Manager for Monitoring and Review and the Review Secretary will meet with the Review Lead and Associate Deans for Research and Innovation to introduce the review and agree a timeline for the process. The timeline will be confirmed by the Secretary following the meeting.

2.7 The timeline will include a formal preliminary meeting between the Review Chair, the Quality Manager for Monitoring and Review, Review Secretary, the Review Lead and Associate Deans for Research and Innovation to confirm the scope of the review and prepare a schedule for the review event normally at least six months before the periodic review date. At this meeting any areas of particular focus for the panel will be agreed. The draft Agenda for the event will be circulated by the Review Secretary following the meeting.

## 3. **Scope of Review**

3.1 In reviewing the University's research degree provision the Panel will give due regard to the expectations, practices and guiding principles as set out in the UK Quality Code for Research Degrees.

#### 4. **Review Submission**

4.1 The review submission should be submitted electronically to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement at least six weeks before the scheduled review event. The submission will be coordinated by the Director of Research and Postgraduate Research in consultation with the Associate Deans for Research and Innovation from each School.

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 appropriate); and management/governance structures. This document should be prepared by the presenting team in consultation with the QAE Officer as early as possible in the preparation of the review.

4.2.2 Self-evaluation document (SED):

The purpose of the SED is to provide a concise, reflective review and analysis of the University's research degree provision and its approach to managing quality and standards. The SED should reflect and cross reference as appropriate, relevant supporting evidence (see 4.2.3). The SED should be co-authored by the Director of Research and Postgraduate Research as review lead and should be prepared in consultation with ADRIIs, other staff and collaborative academic partners as appropriate.

4.2.3 Supporting Evidence

4.2.3.1 A copy of the regulations governing research degrees at the University/validated partner and the University's 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 Research Degrees 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, and for any validated partners compared with institutional and sectorial trends as appropriate. Data to support the review will normally be supplied by Business Intelligence and will usually include the following broken down by type of doctoral award, mode of study, student demographics and School:

- Admissions
- Progression
- Retention
- Timely submission and completion
- Examination outcomes
- Complaints, appeals and exceptional circumstances requests.
- Summary of academic misconduct cases.
- The last two sets of Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) results
- Employment destinations and career paths of students who have achieved a University of Staffordshire research degree.

- 4.2.3.5 A list of current principal supervisors, by School (or other organisational structure as appropriate).
- 4.2.3.6 Copies of School and University annual monitoring reports for research degree provision for the last three years, and the resulting action plans.
- 4.2.3.7 Samples of current research degree course information and any other information provided at induction.
- 4.2.3.8 The current schedule of researcher development sessions and student attendance records for the sessions held over the last 12 months.
- 4.2.3.9 Notes of 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.
- 4.2.3.11 Access to the SharePoint for research degree students.

## **5. Panel Analysis of Submission and Review Meeting**

### **5.1 Initial Analysis of Submission**

Panel members will be asked to submit initial comments on the documentation to the Panel Secretary three weeks in advance of the meeting. Each Panel member will be asked to take a lead on certain areas of the analysis based on their expertise; these areas will be allocated by the Review Chair and confirmed by the Review Secretary when the documentation is made available. 5 All initial comment forms will be circulated to the other panel members and the Review Lead.

### **5.2 Confirmation of Review Event Agenda**

The Quality Manager for Monitoring and Review, Review Secretary and Panel Chair will review the initial panel member comments and use these to confirm the Agenda for the Review Event, in consultation with the Review Lead. A virtual pre-meeting of the Review Panel may also be arranged to facilitate this. The final Agenda will be circulated at least one week before the Periodic Review event.

### **5.3 Periodic Review Event**

The Review will normally be conducted over 1 day. The event will include meetings with School PGR Leads, Research Degree course leaders, other relevant support staff (where applicable); and a range of students, including a selection of student representatives. Partner staff may be included as appropriate. Full details of those meeting the Panel will be finalised through the confirmation of the Agenda Discussions throughout the Review will be informed by the Department's SED and supporting information.

Students meeting the Panel should represent both PhD and Professional Doctorate provision across a range of research degree levels and modes of study.

## **6. Review Outcomes**

- 6.1 Review Panels will highlight good practice identified during the Review and make recommendations which will be considered by both Research Innovation and Enterprise Committee and Quality and Enhancement Committee (QEC). Recommendations can be defined as essential or desirable:

- **Good Practice** is a process or way of working that makes a particularly positive contribution to academic standards and the quality and/or enhancement of the research degrees and should be disseminated across the University.
- **Essential Recommendations** are made to address issues that in the Panel's opinion are putting quality/standards at risk or have the potential do so and must therefore be addressed. The Panel will recommend a timeframe in which the recommendation must be met.
- **Desirable Recommendations** are set where the Panel considers action could further enhance the quality of the provision. These should be considered at the appropriate level and addressed accordingly.

- 6.2 The Review Panel will report indicative outcomes of the periodic review to the Review Lead and Associate Deans for Research and Innovation orally at the end of the Event.
- 6.3 Following the Review, a full report will be produced by the Review Secretary and agreed by the Panel. The Research Degree Committee and individuals who contributed to the review will have the opportunity to comment on the factual accuracy of the report. Once any resulting queries are addressed the report will be presented to RIEC and QEC.
- 6.4 Research Degree Committee and School Academic Committees should also receive the Review report and monitor the follow-up action required.

## 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 agreed with the Panel Chair, Panel Chair and Secretary, normally within a month of approval of the final review report and recommendations by QEC. Progress against the agreed Plan should be monitored by Research Degrees Committee and where appropriate School Academic Boards.
- 7.2 An update on progress should also be received by QEC and RIEC no later than nine months after approval of the original Review Report by the Committee (unless an earlier timeframe for reporting is determined at the time the Report was originally considered).

