Procedure for the Annual Monitoring of Postgraduate Research Degrees

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Research Office Graduate Education Team
1 Introduction

This guidance should be used for the annual monitoring of all postgraduate research degrees at the University of Manchester. For the purpose of this document, the term "postgraduate research student" refers to all students of the following degrees: Master's level research degrees e.g. MSc by Research and MPhil: doctoral degrees and professional, engineering and enterprise doctoral degrees. All collaborative arrangements such as split-site PhDs and CASE awards should be included in the process along with distance learning, part-time and validated provision. This guidance also covers any taught or structured elements of a postgraduate research degree, for example within Professional Doctorates and programmes under the Centres for Doctoral Training (CDTs).

This guidance forms part of the University's Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Degrees and will be supplemented by guidance from the relevant Faculty Graduate Office or the Manchester Doctoral College.

Further information relating to the Code of Practice can be found at: http://www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/researchoffice/graduate/code/.

Separate guidance is provided by the Teaching and Learning Support Office at www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/tlso/map/approvalmonitoringandreviewofeducationalprovision/annualmonitoring/ for the annual monitoring process for undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes.

The annual monitoring review should cover the previous academic year and will normally operate between August and December.

2 Purpose of the annual monitoring process

Annual monitoring is a process of reflection on the previous academic year and action planning for the coming academic year. It must therefore be driven by the reflection of the key staff involved in the oversight of PGR provision within the School, CDT and Faculty e.g. PGR Director, CDT Director and Associate Dean for Graduate Education. The University's approach to annual monitoring is based on a "conversational, not confrontational" approach; honest evaluations based on evidence of what has worked well and what has worked less well. The underlying philosophy and outcomes of the process should be about enhancing research degree provision across the institution and a key focus within Schools, CDTs and Faculties should therefore be on the identification and sharing of good practice and promoting continuous improvement.

The information used to inform this process should be part of a routine and embedded process of gathering and reviewing information about the performance and enhancement of research degrees.

The purpose of annual monitoring is to improve the quality of the postgraduate research provision offered by the University, through:

a) providing an opportunity to review all postgraduate research degrees;

b) considering any relevant external comments on the wider aspects of the provision, including those of external examiners and, where appropriate, employers;

c) encouraging and disseminating good practice;

d) providing input into periodic reviews and external quality assurance visits.
The unit of review for annual monitoring should normally be at School level but in some cases it may be necessary to organize the process by groups of research degrees within the School. This approach will need to be determined in advance of the process through discussion with Faculty Graduate Offices. Each Centre for Doctoral Training programme will also be required to submit an annual monitoring report which should be submitted the Manchester Doctoral College (MDC) Manager (Liz Venn) for distribution to the relevant faculties for the 2010 process.

As part of the annual monitoring procedure, staff are asked to reflect on the effectiveness of provision as delivered during the year, identifying:

- particular achievements and good practice;
- any issues beyond their control that have affected their work;
- aspects that need to be addressed in the short term and recorded in an action plan;
- current or possible future developments within the academic or professional community and the market environment, e.g. an indication of the development of new areas or programmes in the longer term or where development of new programmes may be appropriate. These developments should be recorded in the action plan as appropriate.

Although this reflection will occur naturally throughout the academic year, it is beneficial to undertake an evaluative overview at the end of the academic year and to plan actions for the forthcoming academic year. The output of the continual monitoring will then be considered by the relevant School PGR Committee/CDT Programme Committee or equivalent.

3 Evidence to be considered as part of the annual monitoring process

The focus of the annual monitoring process should be on the consideration of a range of evidence about the research degree provision. The following is a list of evidence that should normally be considered as part of this process. Schools, CDTs and Faculties may wish to expand, adapt and develop this list according to local practice.

- Student feedback – outcomes from internal and external surveys, issues raised by student representatives, other local student feedback outcomes including skills training feedback and taught unit feedback
- Anonymised summary of complaints and appeals and any actions
- Application and recruitment data
- Permissions and submission data
- Completions data
- Final award classification data linked to submission, where available
- Key information provided to students, eg student handbooks
- Feedback from external examiners, employers, supervisors, sponsors, alumni and other key stakeholders
- First Destinations and longer term careers destinations of graduates
- Other relevant information such as external reports from professional bodies, funders etc

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1 As submitted to the Student Experience Office in November each year
2 Available at http://www.sraid.manchester.ac.uk/staffnet/mais/postgraduate/
3 Available from Discoverer by School, Faculty or University
4 Available from Kevin Blake, Planning Support Office for 2008/9 session, for OPR, using HEFCE data
5 Not available as standard University report
The format of the School/CDT annual report will normally be in the form of the detailed minutes of the relevant School/CDT committee meeting or a summary of key points from different meetings across the year. This is then submitted to the relevant Faculty or the MDC Manager for CDT reports. (Appendix A provides a checklist of headings). The minutes/report should provide a list of all attendees and must include a clear action plan showing what actions need to be taken, by whom, and in what timescale and should be accompanied by an electronic copy of the key evidence that was used to inform the process. This should normally include:

- Maximum one page summary of key student feedback issues/best practice from the year
- Standard Discoverer reports on profile of PGR students, permissions and submission data
- Final award classification data, where available
- Summary of appeals and complaints
- Maximum one page summary of external stakeholder feedback, where available

4 Faculty and University processes

The University uses an annual, special meeting of the Graduate Education Group (GEG) each December to consider the separate reports submitted by each Faculty. Annual themes can also be developed from the reports of the Faculties/CDTs as part of the review process to inform an action plan and best practice. Following this meeting, a report summarising the discussion is produced, which records examples of innovative practice, and sets agreed actions for the coming year. The implementation of the actions will be monitored by the Graduate Education Group and incorporated into the Graduate Education operational plan.

The annual monitoring and Operational Planning and Resources (OPR) processes have different objectives and requirements so following detailed discussions at the Graduate Administrators Group and with the Teaching and Learning Support Office and the University’s Planning Office it has been agreed that the processes will remain separate. Qualitative and quantitative information about the provision should be shared across both processes wherever possible e.g. submission and completion data, student feedback, first destination data etc but there is no requirement to include the annual monitoring outcomes within the OPR submission or vice versa.

5 Suggested timetable for annual monitoring each academic year

The following timescale for annual monitoring is recommended:

August/September
University management information on standard PGR reports provided to Schools for checking and confirmation.
School/CDT meetings to consider annual monitoring and review evidence/data on PGR provision

October/November
Faculty committees meet to consider the extracts from the minutes of the School/CDT-level committees and prepare annual monitoring summary
MDC Manager to attend CDT meetings where possible

November
Associate Vice President for Graduate Education and Head of Graduate Education to attend Faculty PGR committees to discuss annual monitoring outcomes

December
University annual monitoring report produced. Special meeting of the Graduate Education Group considers University and Faculty annual monitoring reports. Report and action plans used to inform Graduate Education operational plan for implementation during the following year.

6 The relationship between annual monitoring and periodic review

Annual monitoring complements the periodic review procedure. For a brief overview of the differences and the relationship between the two processes, see the following paragraphs:

**Annual monitoring** is an ongoing process of reflection and action planning. It should be driven by the staff delivering a programme or group of cognate programmes. Programme teams are asked to reflect on the effectiveness of programmes as delivered during the year, identifying: particular achievements; any issues beyond their control that have affected their work; aspects that need to be addressed in the short term and recorded in an action plan; and current or possible future developments within the academic or professional community and the market environment.

**Periodic review** is a review at the discipline or School level of the continuing validity and relevance of programme aims and intended learning outcomes, the quality of the student experience and a School's management of its programmes (or discipline areas). Periodic review also includes a review of the portfolio of programmes, assessing subject health and planning for future provision. Periodic review is developmental and based on a dialogue between peers including at least one external subject specialist. Periodic review is organised by the Faculty who produce a report for consideration by the School, Faculty and Vice-President (Teaching and Learning). In addition to the ongoing cycle of periodic review of taught programmes, PGR provision will be specifically reviewed every five years through an extended series of Faculty and GEG meetings which will include external representation.
APPENDIX A: Annual Monitoring reports

Checklist of headings for annual monitoring minutes/report.\(^7\)

1. **School/Faculty/CDT/MDC**
2. **Date of meeting**
3. **Attendees at meeting**
4. **Degrees included in the annual monitoring exercise**
5. **Update on action plan from previous year**
6. **Summary of any major changes to degrees throughout the year**
7. **Selection and admissions including student information**
   Are there any issues about applications being converted into offers and admissions? Are recruitment strategies clear and well executed? Are target places being filled? Are there any significant trends in postgraduate student numbers? What are the characteristics of the intake population (i.e. gender balance, home/overseas), are these significant? Is the student information provided appropriate, coordinated and timely?

8. **Supervision arrangements and feedback**
   Are supervision arrangements working satisfactorily? Have any significant issues been raised by students or other stakeholders in this area? If so how have these been addressed? Are there any issues relating to supervisor:student ratios? Are supervisor awareness sessions offered and are these considered useful by supervisors and other key staff? Do supervisors receive a handbook or other key information on their role? How are supervisors engaging with eProg?

9. **Progress and review**
   Are progress and review processes operating satisfactorily? How effectively has the introduction of eProg been managed and is it useful for managing student progression? What are the key trends emerging from the analysis of special permissions data and how effective is the University’s special permissions policy?

10. **Student feedback and representation**
    How does student representation work? What methods are used to gather student feedback? What key issues have been raised and how have they been addressed? How will the University’s new PGR specific student representation policy be implemented during 2010-11 or is it already being delivered?

11. **Transferable skills training**
    Any particular issues or best practice on the quality or relevance of skills training provision raised by students, supervisors or external stakeholders or by data on attendance on courses? Any issues and concerns about the impact of future changes to Roberts funding?

12. **Taught elements of research degrees**
    Any particular issues about the taught component of the degree.

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\(^7\) It is not necessary for all minutes to cover all headings and points extensively and additional areas can be added as required. These headings are provided as a guide and series of prompts to aid discussion. Some headings may not be appropriate and should therefore not be included.
13. **Student support**
What is the quality of support available to research students within the school/CDT, including an evaluation of the capacity to support the type and range of students and their diverse needs including part-time, overseas and split-site or distance learning students. Has there been any feedback from key stakeholders about how support is working and areas for improvement? Are there any funding support issues?

14. **Assessment and the examinations processes**
How has the implementation of the new PGR examinations policy worked? Are there any trends emerging from the analysis of the breakdown of examination award classifications?

15. **Submission and completion**
Any issues highlighted through the analysis of the submission and completion data and associated processes? Progress on meeting the Manchester 2015 objective of “achieving annual increases in the number of postgraduate research students successfully completing their programme within the specified period consistent with doubling the number of completions by 2015”?

16. **Careers and first destination**
Any issues highlighted in the data or other feedback mechanisms?

17. **Feedback from key stakeholders**
Are any major changes to provision required as a result of stakeholder feedback
How does staff feedback correlate with student feedback and discussions at the staff/student liaison committee (or equivalent). Feedback from examiners from the previous year.

18. **Collaboration (where appropriate)**
For research degree programmes that involve some form of collaboration eg CDT programmes, split-site PhD, CASE awards etc what are the particular challenges for these awards? Are there any issues emerging from students or other stakeholders relating specifically to the collaborative elements of the provision?

19. **Appeals and complaints**
Any particular issues or best practice identified from appeals and complaints during the previous academic year.

20. **Innovations and best practice**
Provide examples that have emerged through the annual monitoring process

21. **Support needs**
Any support needs identified, e.g. IT, learning or space resource.

22. **Time away from the University**
Do students spend some of their time away from the University e.g. on placements, outreach activity, fieldwork etc? How is this time managed and are there any issues or concerns that need addressing?