

Policy on Student Representation for Postgraduate Research Students

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. The University of Manchester is committed to receiving and responding to student feedback in order to bring about improvements to the quality of the student experience and to provide appropriate opportunities for students to contribute to the formulation and development of policy.
- 1.2. This document provides information on policy and procedural issues at the University of Manchester in relation to the representation of postgraduate research students throughout their programme of study. Implementation of the policy will be assessed via the annual monitoring process. The 2011/12 annual monitoring process will review the process thoroughly after it has been in operation for two academic sessions.
- 1.3. For the purpose of this policy, the term “postgraduate research student” refers to all students of the following degrees: masters level research degrees, doctoral degrees and professional, engineering and enterprise doctoral degrees.
- 1.4. This policy is intended for use by academic and administrative staff and all postgraduate research students. It provides a framework for defining the requirements for student representation, whilst recognising that local practice may vary according to discipline at Faculty and/or School level.
- 1.5. This policy forms part of the University's Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Degrees. Further information relating to the Code of Practice can be found at: <http://www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/researchoffice/graduate/code/>

2. Definition of Student Representation for Postgraduate Research Students

- 2.1. Student representation for postgraduate research students provides a means by which students can raise any issues and concerns and communicate their opinions and thoughts on their student experience to relevant staff.
- 2.2. It also provides an opportunity for students to contribute to the formulation and development of postgraduate research policy, ensuring that the student perspective is taken into account.
- 2.3. The implementation of this policy can be varied according to the individual needs of Faculties, Doctoral Training Centres and Schools and their student profile, whilst continuing to share best practice. However, to monitor the implementation of the policy, Faculties, Doctoral Training Centres and Schools will be expected to complete a related section of the annual monitoring process, where they will be required to detail the means by which the policy is being implemented.
- 2.4. It should be noted that formal processes exist whereby students are able to make a complaint (Regulation XVIII) or to appeal against a decision which affects his/her academic status or progress (Regulation XIX). (Regulations are available at <http://documents.manchester.ac.uk>)

3. Key Principles of Student Representation

- 3.1. Faculties, Doctoral Training Centres and Schools can establish different means of student representation for postgraduate research students but the following principles **MUST** be met when formulating their policy.
- 3.2. There should be regular meetings at which opportunities are offered for meaningful discussion between nominated student representatives and academic and/or administrative staff normally at the following levels across the University:
 - Programme/Discipline
 - School
 - Faculty
 - Doctoral Training Centre
 - University

In establishing appropriate student representation, consideration must be given to the size and scope of the student body to ensure that the student representatives can undertake their role effectively. For example, there may be a need for more than one representative to be nominated to cover more diverse and extensive provision.

All students should be informed during induction and in appropriate handbooks and/or other student information about how student representation works. The information provided should include details about opportunities to contribute to and enhance their experience in a timely way by acting as a student representative to represent their defined cohort.

- 3.3. There should be a democratic process by which student representatives are nominated. Whilst recognising that formal elections may not always be the most appropriate means by which postgraduate research student representatives are chosen, Schools/Faculties/Doctoral Training Centres should ensure that appropriate arrangements for selection are in place by the end of November in each academic year and a full list of all representatives should be submitted to the Faculty Graduate Office or Manchester Doctoral College Manager each year. Information about the student representation process will be requested as part of the annual monitoring process.
- 3.4. Student representatives should always be invited to relevant meetings and other appropriate fora. If they are unable to attend a particular meeting they should be invited to send an alternative representative and they should have an opportunity to provide comments prior to the meeting on relevant item(s) on the agenda.
- 3.5. All postgraduate research students should be made aware of their relevant student representative(s) and of how they can be contacted, by the end of November each academic year.
- 3.6. All Schools/Doctoral Training Centres should nominate a member of staff (academic or administrative) to act as a first point of contact for support on representation issues and to co-ordinate postgraduate research student representation within the area.
- 3.7. Student representatives should attend relevant training/briefing sessions as organised by their School/Discipline/Area.
- 3.8. Training for new academics and supervisor awareness training should include reference to this policy.

4. Roles and Responsibilities of the Postgraduate Research Student Representative

The main responsibilities of the postgraduate research student representative are:

- To attend relevant committee meetings/appropriate fora where required in order to communicate key issues/concerns and information from the student cohort or area of representation.
- To attend the unreserved business section of the agenda and to be aware that they can not attend for reserved business which would normally deal with individual student matters¹.
- To arrange for an alternative representative to attend meetings if they are unable to attend in person.
- To undertake training on postgraduate research student representation.
- To put in place mechanisms to gather student issues and to provide regular and timely feedback to the student body and development of postgraduate research student policy, where appropriate.
- To provide a means of bringing together the relevant student body, where appropriate with support from the School/Faculty etc.

5. Roles and Responsibilities of School/Discipline/Area Contact for Postgraduate Research Student Representatives

The main responsibilities of the School/Discipline/Area contact are:

- To ensure that a democratic process is in place to appoint the relevant student representatives by the end of November in each academic year.
- To give adequate notice of meetings. The relevant Chair/Secretary should be made aware of the need to have the student in mind when preparing the agenda and should take time to ensure that the student is at ease at meetings and is given the opportunity to contribute to the discussion.
- To provide details of student representatives to the appropriate Faculty Graduate Office and to the Students' Union by the end of November in each academic year.
- To ensure that adequate facilities are in place for communication of information to the relevant student body (physical or other as appropriate).
- To ensure that training for postgraduate research student representatives is available at the appropriate time in the academic year and that details are circulated to all relevant students. The contact should assess the training needs of individual student representatives, taking account of prior experience.

¹ In exceptional circumstances the Chair may request that other issues are added to this section of the agenda.

6. Roles and Responsibilities of the Students' Union

- To provide all student representatives with information on services provided by the Students' Union, covering its unique representation and advocacy roles.
- To provide information about the ways in which elected representatives within the Students' Union are able to raise issues at University level.

7. Training for Postgraduate Research Student Representatives

Training will normally be provided for postgraduate research student representatives by the appropriate Faculty postgraduate research training co-ordinator or equivalent, in consultation with the Students' Union. Training should include the provision of information about University Committee structures, the names of appropriate committees, their function, regularity of meetings etc.

Appendix 1 - Job Description for PGR Student Representatives

Purpose

- To act as a conduit between relevant groups of students and members of the University on matters of concern.
- To represent relevant groups of students in appropriate discussions on University postgraduate research policy formulation and development.

Main Responsibilities

- To attend relevant committee meetings or other appropriate fora.
- To attend training session(s) on student representation.
- To be available to listen to fellow students' views, concerns and academic issues.
- To feedback outcomes of representations to fellow students via chosen means (physical or electronic).
- To co-ordinate postgraduate research student representation within the area, where appropriate.
- To liaise with the nominated member of academic or administrative staff appointed as first point of contact for support.

Skills Development

Student representatives will have the opportunity to develop the following skills:

- Communication
- Presentation
- Diplomacy
- Team work
- Assertiveness
- Networking
- Organisational
- Management

Main Contacts

- Appropriate academic and administrative staff within the Faculty/School etc.
- Students within the designated area
- Other student representatives.
- Student Union
- Student Union Academic Affairs Officer

Resources

- Notice board with contact details (or agreed electronic means of communicating necessary information or feedback)
- Student handbook

Training

- Training will be provided by a designated member of the relevant Faculty PGR skills training team early in each academic year.
- The Students' Union will provide necessary background information and offer other appropriate training.

Benefits

- CV enhancement
- Opportunity to impact upon policy formulation and development for the benefit of current and future students
- Skills development
- Opportunities for networking on a wider scale

Appendix 2 - Examples of Good Practice

Use of Student Representatives in Policy Development and Implementation

- Manchester, Humanities, MBS: Chair of PGR representatives attends PGR Committee and School Board; PGR manager meets regularly with Student representatives. Students are “interested and motivated” and do attend meetings.
- Manchester, Humanities, Law: 3 Student representatives across the years who do attend meetings. The opinions of student representatives are sought on all policy implementation issues, e.g. the development of a revised policy on annual review monitoring.
- Manchester, FLS: Postgraduate Student Society; forum for democratically electing representatives on FLS committees (Graduate Training Programme Committee, Research Degrees Committee).
- National Student Forum: 12-15 students, PGR representative among them.
- Eurodoc (www.eurodoc.net): One objective: “To promote the circulation of information on issues regarding young researchers; organise events, take part in debates and assist in the elaboration of policies about higher education and research in Europe”. Membership for UK listed as National Postgraduate Committee. (Member of the Board (Spanish) working in Manchester as a Post-Doc.)
- Trinity College, Dublin: 3 members of the Executive of the Graduate Students’ Union are PGR students: Chair, Vice-Chair and Treasurer.
- Newcastle: Separate Staff-Student Committee at School level recommended for PGR; good, clear policy statement. Committee reports to Faculty Fora, which report to the Graduate School Education Committee.
- Yale, USA: Graduate Student Assembly. Student representatives on all standing committees. GSA Charter 2e “no policy changes without an opportunity to discuss and comment re: GTA, teacher training, grievance, disciplinary

Social and Communication

- Manchester, FLS: Use of student lunches (either across year or research groups), where feedback given on issues previously raised.
- Manchester, FLS: Student PGR Society seen as a community within the Faculty. Use of Roberts money to fund annual Away Day with big-draw speaker.
- Manchester, FLS: Postgraduate Student Society Website with comment/threads, links to Facebook/Twitter; system for communication between postgraduate student cohort and their representatives.
- Manchester, Humanities, MBS: Currently established PGR society, working with Students’ Union.

Electronic

- Manchester, MHS, Cancer: online satisfaction site
- Manchester, FLS: use of Facebook, online bulletins; student focus group on intranet, providing opportunity to highlight policy changes resulting from student discussion.
- Cambridge: Students interface with the Board (of Graduate Studies) via personal self-service webpages.

Training and Feedback

- Manchester, FLS: Developing New Academic training programme
- Manchester, FLS: Feedback provided during and at end of each training session in the form of interactive voting pads to “quantify” opinion and via paper questionnaires for more detailed comments. This gauges student opinion at the point at which training is given.
- Manchester, FLS: In-house, light-touch SR training; use handover check list.
- Birmingham: Holds end of year forum where feedback given on changes which have been introduced in the past year.
- Manchester, FLS: Annual feedback session via informal focus group with external facilitators: has impacted on development of the Graduate Training Programme.
- Newcastle: Student representatives must participate in training.
- Manchester, MHS: Dentistry, provision of information sheet about relevant committees and their functions.

Mentoring

- Manchester, FLS: Most Student representatives act as peer mentors; peer mentoring organised by students.
- Manchester, Humanities, MBS: Most Student representatives act as pre-admission and first year student mentors. This policy has been supported by Teaching and Learning Support Office and has a small grant to develop more on-line pre-admissions support, more interactive student comment and to develop mentor training manuals.

Choosing Student Representatives

- Manchester, FLS: Student representation introduced at induction and representatives are selected democratically through the Postgraduate Student Society.
- Northumbria: 9 PGR Student representatives, 1 per School, appointed by Students’ Union following receipt of 20 signatures of support and reference.