Graduate School

University of
Reading

DIRECTORS OF PGR STUDIES: BRIEFING GUIDE FOR NEW POST-HOLDERS

Introduction

The position of School Director of Postgraduate Research Studies (SDPGRS) is an important role in the management and leadership of a School. Appointment of a new director should follow a similar process to the appointment of School Director of Teaching & Learning, with a call for expressions of interest and interviews if there is more than one candidate. A generic job description for the post is available on the Graduate School website[1].

Where a School has clearly delineated intra-school departments, many of the School Directors' duties may be carried out by Department Directors of PGR Studies. It is important that there is clarity within each School about which duties are the responsibility of the School Directors and which are the responsibility of Department Directors. However, it is School Directors who, together with Heads of School, are responsible for setting PGR recruitment targets for the overall School and submitting these to the Graduate School.

The purpose of this guide is to provide you with key information that will help you to fulfil your role more effectively. The guide draws on many documents and other sources that you will need to be familiar with. Its purpose is not to provide an exhaustive summary of relevant policies and procedures, but to set out your role in relation to implementing such policies and other appropriate practices within your School or Department.

Key sources of information

The key document, with which you will need to be familiar, is the University of Reading *Code of Practice for Research Students.* This sets out the requirements for all parties involved in the awarding of research degrees at Reading. It covers relevant policies and procedures relating to the admission, induction, supervision, monitoring of progress, and assessment of research students. The *Code* is supplemented by a number of other policy documents and good practice guides (including the Code of Conduct for Supervisors), which are available on the Graduate School website, in the section 'Information for supervisors and staff'.

http://www.reading.ac.uk/graduateschool/supervisorsandresearchstaff/gs-sr-home.aspx

More generally, the Graduate School website has a large amount of relevant material about PGR study and is a very useful resource. It is worth spending a bit of time familiarising yourself with its content relating to types of PGR programmes, different modes of study, training and development opportunities for PGR students, and English language support.

The other main source of useful information is the PGR dashboard. This contains all of the relevant data in relation to PhD recruitment, progression, and examination for your School. It includes comparator data from selected competitors. It is maintained by staff in the Planning Support Office and is updated quarterly. If you need to be given access to the dashboard, or have any queries about the data on your dashboard, you need to contact Nathan Helsby in the Planning Support Office.

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[1] Available at http://www.reading.ac.uk/web/FILES/qualitysupport/sdpgrsresponsibilities.pdf

Working with your designated PGR administrator

Each School / Department has a designated PGR administrator. For all Schools except HBS they are employed in the Graduate School and based in Old Whiteknights House. On taking up your post, you should arrange to meet your designated administrator/s. You need to agree with him or her how you can best work together on a day to day basis, so that he or she can provide you with effective support. Several of the administrators support more than one Department / School so you need to appreciate that they may have other demands on their time. The administrators work together in the School Support Team, primarily based on the first floor of the Graduate School, and they are generally able to provide cover for each other in the case of holidays and sick leave. Your administrator will be line-managed by either Cat Hale or Katie Saxelby- Smith (the Joint Heads of the DRO). If you have any concerns about the level of support you are getting you should contact either Cat (c.hale@reading.ac.uk) or Katie (k.saxelby- smith@reading.ac.uk).

Directors' Main tasks

Recruitment

Recruiting and retaining an increasing number of high quality doctoral students is central to the University's mission and its standing as a leading research intensive university. It is your responsibility to encourage staff in your School to agree to supervise high quality prospective students whose research interests align with theirs. You should ensure that the admissions process within your School / Department works effectively, with no unnecessary hold-ups. We know that responding to prospective students as soon as possible is a key factor in ensuring acceptances and enrolments.

You should agree with your administrator how you will handle, and respond to, new enquiries and applications. You should ensure that supervisors are aware that, where they are contacted directly by prospective students, they should either forward the email to you or copy you into their response to the student.

It is also helpful if you can encourage supervisors to be flexible when considering candidate's research proposals so that, if proposals are not up to scratch, they provide helpful feedback and encourage resubmission, or suggest an alternate project that the candidate could work on.

Similarly, once offers have been made, it is helpful to keep in contact with prospective students, as experience has shown that this increases the likelihood of their enrolment.

Jon Lloyd (j.d.lloyd@reading.ac.uk), the PGR Recruitment and Marketing Officer, is based within the Graduate School and is very happy to provide you with advice and support in relation to recruitment and marketing.

PGR Target Setting

Around September each year, I contact Heads of School and School Directors to ask them to set their PGR recruitment target numbers for the following session and the remainder of the planning period, by a deadline in late October. These need to be discussed and agreed with Heads of School as they feed into the annual School planning process. Detailed instructions and relevant contextual information will be provided at that time.

Studentship competitions

The Graduate School runs a number of studentship competitions throughout the year. Details of all of these can be found on the Graduate School website funding pages. A number of these competitions require Directors to submit nominations on behalf of their School.

    a) International studentships. One full-award and six fees-only awards are normally made each year, and are available for students studying in all areas apart from those based in Henley Business School. Directors are contacted in early October and need to identify, in consultation with the Head of School, two candidates (ranked in priority) to nominate for the competition (by a deadline in early March). Candidates must have received an offer of admission by the University by the time the nominations are submitted.

    b) China Scholarships Council. The University supports two awards each year, in an

arrangement whereby we pay the fees and a small training grant, while the Chinese Scholarship Council cover the living costs. The awards have to be made in the areas of climate and environmental change, agriculture and food security, or health and well-being. Directors are contacted in November each year and asked to nominate any Chinese applicants who are considered to be strong candidates for these Scholarships (by a deadline in late February).

c) Felix Scholarships. Unfortunately, Reading currently only has one PhD Felix scholarship to offer each year (along with five Master's scholarships). We are allowed to nominate up to 20 candidates, of which up to five can be for the PhD award, to the Felix Trust who make the decision as to which candidates will receive awards. Applicants need to have been accepted for a place, and completed a Felix short application form by the end of January. The process is now run by the Global Recruitment team but there is further information on the Graduate School website.

Some Schools fund their own studentships. Where this is the case, the Graduate School manages the process of advertising and making offers (including producing the formal offer letter). For further information, contact Trica Burgess.

Appointing supervisors

It is University policy that each research student has more than one named supervisor and that a minimum of two supervisors should be recorded on RISIS. Joint supervision arrangements need to be in place before the end of the first term of study for incoming students. We appreciate that occasionally this requirement can be problematic, particularly in small departments. However, the second supervisor can take a number of different roles and may act more as a mentor or advisor. Furthermore, supervision may be within or across departments, or with an external partner. Emeritus and Honorary staff can also act as co-supervisors.

New students' induction

Working with your administrator, you should arrange an induction meeting for new students starting in the Autumn Term. At that event, you should cover all the necessary School / Department related information. You should ensure that your students are told to attend the University-wide induction / welcome meeting run by the Graduate School (usually in the first week of October – you will be advised of the date and location well in advance of the event), where they will be told about the Graduate School, the RRDP training programme, other support available, events, etc. You should ensure that the timing of your own induction event does not clash with the Graduate School event.

Although numbers might not warrant further induction meetings for students starting later in the year (e.g. January or April / May) you should ensure that you provide the necessary information to late starters following their registration. The Graduate School runs its central induction events in January and early May, as well as in October.

Graduate School desk allocation

In addition to student hot-desking facilities, the Graduate School has 60 desks available for student usage. These are allocated for longer term usage for a maximum of one year at a time. The majority of these desks are allocated to students in the Arts & Humanities and some Social Sciences who do not have sufficient space in their own Schools / Departments.

Students are notified at the start of each academic session of the date by which they have to submit a request (usually in early November). Part-time students can apply provided they are willing to share the allocated space with another student whose working pattern complements theirs. Copies of the requests are forwarded to the relevant School / Department Director, who is asked to rank the cases in terms of priority need. The Graduate School then assesses the requests, the ranking, and the overall PGR student numbers in the School / Department, in making allocations.

RRDP and Learning Needs Analysis

During their first two to three weeks, new PhD students need to carry out a Learning Needs Analysis (LNA) using the template on the Graduate School website, and discuss this with their supervisors.

Once they have done this, the completed template should be signed off by you (to ensure they have engaged properly with the exercise). It is a mandatory requirement that research students attend a minimum number of RRDP sessions each academic year (five in year 1 for FT students). Directors can reduce requirements in exceptional cases (e.g. where students have significant professional experience or where Schools / DTPs provide some elements of generic / professional skills training). If you are in doubt about whether a reduction is warranted, you should contact either Pam Stuart (Sciences / Life Sciences) or Joanna John (Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences) in the Graduate School.

The Graduate School also runs a Preparing to Teach programme (in collaboration with CQSD), a PGR Leadership programme (in collaboration with HBS), a PGR women's development programme (SPRINT), as well as a number of English Language Support courses for PGR Students (in collaboration with ISLI). Further information is available on our website.

Immigration and Visas

Directors should be aware of the need for all students holding a Tier 4 visa to have their attendance at the University regularly monitored under the University's compliance obligations. It is expected that Directors will be aware of any PGR students who appear to have lost contact with their School / Department and will ensure that any suspected loss of contact is reported to the Doctoral Research Office promptly. In consultation with the School / Department nominated Tier 4 attendance monitoring contact, this loss of contact should also be reported via the University's termly attendance monitoring exercise.

More detailed information on PGR specific immigration matters can be found at
http://www.reading.ac.uk/gs-immigration.aspx

Suspensions, Extensions, Requests to change status, etc.

These types of request will come in from students throughout the year. There are specific forms which should be completed to make cases to the Graduate School for approval. Your School / Department administrator has copies of forms. Extensions are only agreed in exceptional circumstances. You should ensure that you are aware of the regulations relating to Tier 4 students and the maximum number of days that they are allowed to suspend their studies and remain in the UK (currently 60 days). Staff in the Doctoral Research Office in the Graduate School can answer any queries.

Monitoring of Progress

It is a formal requirement that each PGR student's progress is assessed at least once a year, and there is an agreed process for doing this, with template forms which should be used. Many Schools, however, supplement this with a less formal assessment of progress part way through each year. Your administrator will have copies of the relevant forms, and they are also available on the Graduate School website. Most Schools run the formal process during the Spring term each year but we do allow for some variation in process, and in specific questions asked / information required from students, provided the standard requirements are met. The process must be completed by the start of September at the latest. A guide for staff on Monitoring of Progress is available on the Graduate School website, in the section for supervisors and staff.

It is really important that any issues affecting a student's progress are picked up, and dealt with, as promptly as possible (including making a case for suspension). Experience has shown that students are rarely able to make up for time lost earlier in their programme at later stages. Where students are not making appropriate progress, either because of lack of engagement or lack of ability, then they must be give clear feedback and deadlines by which they have to complete specific tasks. Records should be kept of all communications, in case these are needed as evidence for a subsequent decision to recommend termination of registration, or transfer to another programme.

International student progress is often impeded by their ability to write clearly in English. It is important that any such limitations are picked up and addressed at the start of their study. As

noted above, the Graduate School (in collaboration with ISLI) runs a number of English language support courses specifically aimed at PGR students. You should direct international students to this provision at the start of their programmes.

Annual Evaluation of Supervisory Arrangements

The Graduate School sends out a survey in May each year to all PGR students asking them various questions about their satisfaction with their supervisory arrangements. The completed forms are returned directly to the Graduate School as many students are concerned about raising issues within their Schools / Departments. The Heads of the DRO read through the completed forms and identify any where students have raised significant concerns that require following up. They contact the students for further information and ask if they can speak with the relevant School / Department Director in confidence.

Examiner nominations

The Doctoral Examinations Officer, Sean Semple who is based in the Graduate School (s.semple@reading.ac.uk) requests nominations from Schools (via the relevant administrator) once students have sent him their completed Intention to Submit form. This should done around four months before the student is due to submit. The administrators contact the supervisors to request nominations, and should copy in Directors. Nomination forms must be signed off by the Director, or Head of School / Department, before being returned to Sean, as they are formally responsible for making the nomination. It is essential that nominations are submitted before the student submits in order to avoid any unnecessary delays to the examination process. Further information is available on the Graduate School website examinations section.

Annual Doctoral Conference and associated competitions

The Annual Doctoral Conference is held in June each year. It is important that Schools do not arrange to hold their own conferences on the same date. The date of the University-wide conference is set a year in advance and Directors are notified. In January each year, the Graduate School sends out a call for entries for the various competitions that are associated with the conference. For most competitions, the call goes directly to students. It is helpful if Directors promote the competitions within their Schools / Departments and encourage students to enter. The call for nominations for the PhD Researcher of the Year goes to School / Department Directors, who jointly with the relevant Research Division leader, identify a nominee for each of the relevant research division/s. School / Department Directors are responsible for submitting the selected nomination to the Graduate School by the March deadline.

Fairbrother lecture

This is a public lecture given by a PhD student usually in May each year, with the aim of showcasing the excellence and relevance of postgraduate research at Reading. It attracts a large audience from within and outside of the University. Directors are contacted in early September to nominate any suitable candidates for their School (by a deadline in mid-October). The subsequent selection process not only identifies the student who will give the lecture but also a number of shortlisted entries who take part in a visual showcase of work which is displayed at the event.

Professor Dianne Berry
Dean of PGR Studies

June 2019.

Annual Calendar of Tasks

Month	Task
September	Arrange School / Department induction events for new students Receive call for nominations for Fairbrother Lecture Receive request for PGR recruitment targets
October	Receive call for international studentships competition Deadline for submitting PGR targets Deadline for nominations for Fairbrother Lecture Deadline for PGR recruitment targets
November	Receive call for China Scholarships Council nominations Receive allocations for desks in Graduate School Return ranked list for desks to Graduate School
January	Receive call for PhD Researcher of the Year nominations
February	Deadline for China Scholarship Council nominations
March	Deadline for International Studentship nominations Deadline for PhD Research of the Year nominations