SECTION 7

Research Degrees

1.   INTRODUCTION

> **Indicator 1:** Higher education providers that are research degree awarding bodies have regulations for research degrees that are clear and readily available to research students and staff, including examiners. Where appropriate, regulations are supplemented by similarly accessible, subject-specific guidance at the level of the faculty, school, department, research centre, or research institute.
>
> **Indicator 2:** Higher education providers develop, implement and keep under review codes of practice for research degrees, which are widely applicable and help enable the higher education provider meet the Expectation of this Chapter. The codes are readily available to all students and staff involved in research degrees, and written in clear language understood by all users.
>
> UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2012), Chapter B11: Research Degrees

Responsibility for the implementation of quality assurance and enhancement relating to research degrees has been delegated to the University's Research Degrees Committee by Academic Council. Administrative support to this Committee is provided by the Graduate School.

The Graduate School provides operational support for the University's quality assurance procedures and processes for research degrees, also referred to as the University's Code of Practice in liaison with the Department for Governance and Academic Quality.

In addition to this section of the *Academic Quality Handbook*, it is recommended the following University Academic Regulations are consulted:

Regulation A6: Research Degrees

Regulation A4: Assessment and Recommendations of Assessment Boards (for particular reference to the *Postgraduate Certificate (PgCert) Research Methods*)

Regulation A3 – Section 2: Student Misconduct Procedure

Complaints Handling Procedure

In producing this section of the *Handbook* due cognisance has been taken of *Chapter B11: Research Degrees* of the *UK Quality Code for Higher Education*).

2.   APPLICATION, ADMISSION AND ENROLMENT OF RESEARCH STUDENTS

Refer also to Regulation A6: Research Degrees, paragraphs 2 and 3.

> **Indicator 4:** Higher education providers accept research students only into an environment that provides support for doing and learning about research, and where excellent research, recognised by the relevant subject community, is occurring.
>
> **Indicator 5:** Higher education providers' admissions procedures for research degrees are clear, consistently applied and demonstrate equality of opportunity.
>
> **Indicator 6:** Only appropriately qualified and prepared applicants are admitted to research degree programmes. Admissions decisions involve at least two members of the higher education provider's staff who have received training and guidance for the selection and admission of research degree students. The decision-making process enables the higher education provider to assure itself that balanced and independent admissions decisions have been made in accordance with its admissions policy.
>
> UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2012), Chapter B11: Research Degrees

2.1 General Enquiries

The Graduate School is responsible for coordinating all research student applications. Potential applicants are requested to read information about the University, which is divided into the following sections:

- Research Degrees – choose a subject

- Applying for a Research Degree

- Apply to Become a Research Student (information for members of RGU staff only).

These sections answer most queries in relation to the application process, but specific enquiries can be addressed by emailing researchdegrees@rgu.ac.uk.

2.2 Advertisements

Vacancies may arise from time to time for funded studentships. These may be funded externally or by the relevant School. As a minimum, any advertisement should include:

- details of the project available;

- qualifications/experience/knowledge and skills requirements;

- whether partial or full fees will be covered;

- if an allowance (monthly stipend) is to be paid to the applicant;

- closing date of application.

Further particulars related to the studentship should be passed to the Graduate School.

In preparing an advertised vacancy, a School should consider the following:

> Indicator 4: Higher education providers accept research students only into an environment that provides support for doing and learning about research, and where excellent research, recognised by the relevant subject community, is occurring.
>
> UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2012), Chapter B11: Research Degrees

2.3 Selection Process

2.3.1 Submission of Application

Completed electronic applications should be submitted by applicants including electronic uploads of additional documents such as:

- two recent academic references;

- scans of academic transcripts detailing marks/grades achieved by the applicant;

- graduation certificates;

- appropriate English language certificates for applicants whose first language or language of university education is not English.

In addition, an international applicant may be asked to provide further documentation to comply with UK immigration legislation, such as previous UK study visas as part of an academic progression assessment.

2.3.2   References

The references provided can either be on the standard Referee Checklist available on request from the Graduate School or the selected referees may choose to write a personal reference. Any reference should highlight the applicant's research strengths, ideally mapped against the applicant's proposed topic. These can be uploaded into an applicant's electronic application.

2.3.3   Consideration and Short-Listing

Once an application is complete, it will be passed electronically by the Graduate School to the appropriate School for consideration. Candidates may be shortlisted for a vacancy, usually by the Research Degree Coordinator and proposed Principal Supervisor, on the basis of their academic fitness and general experience. Research Degree Coordinators complete an interview template to confirm the decision and, if an applicant requires a visa to study with the University, the template is uploaded into the application to assist with *UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI)* compliance.

2.3.4   Entry Standards

As a minimum standard, applicants should have the equivalent of a Class 2.1 Honours Degree. Non-standard qualifications are accepted if supported by additional academic qualifications or relevant work experience but this is assessed on an individual basis and requires the approval of the University's Research Degrees Committee (refer also to Regulation A6: Research Degrees, paragraph 2.2, Admission Requirements).

2.3.5   Research Student Application/Appointment Checklist

The *Research Student Application/Appointment Checklist (RSAC)* should be completed online by the Research Degree Coordinator to assist the final decision to interview or reject. An interview panel should also be identified. The School should then contact the candidates with suggested interview dates.

2.3.6   Interviews

All candidates should normally be interviewed by a panel of at least two people from the School who have received instruction, advice and guidance in respect of selection and admissions procedures. In circumstances where the candidate cannot be interviewed, because he/she is based overseas, the School should hold a telephone or video-conferencing interview.

2.4   Appointment

If the School decides to make an offer, the *Research Student Application/Appointment Checklist (RSAC),* provided within the online application system should be completed by the Research

Degree Coordinator in discussion with the proposed Principal Supervisor. The RSAC will specify the terms and conditions of the appointment as well as the start date (usually February or October). The Graduate School is then notified to issue the *Offer Letter*.

An *Offer Letter*, normally conditional, is then provided online for the applicant to download and/or print. Conditions may include the provision of an additional satisfactory reference, successful completion of a current course of study, or evidence of an approved English language test, if appropriate. The *Offer Letter* will also include reference to the research student undertaking the *Postgraduate Certificate (PgCert) Research Methods* which is compulsory for all research students, unless appropriate prior learning can be demonstrated to the satisfaction of the Course Management Team. The Graduate School will require the applicant to formally accept this offer through the online system. Thereafter, the candidate will be advised of enrolment arrangements by Academic Administration.

If the applicant is international and proposing to study full-time on campus, utilising a Tier 4 study visa, there may be additional conditions added to the *Offer Letter*. These may include:

▪ paying a 34% deposit towards Year 1 fees

▪ provision of approved/certified bank statements showing the applicant has sufficient funds to cover the remainder of Year 1 fees plus living expenses;

▪ provision of a sponsor letter (if applicable);

▪ academic progression check, if the applicant has previous UK study and did not provide these documents as part of their initial application;

▪ Valid TB (Tuberculosis Test) medical certificate from an approved Home Office Clinic, if applying from a country listed in the UK Visa and Immigration web site (if applicable);

▪ Academic Technology Approval Scheme (ATAS) approval (if applicable).

Once these conditions are met, the Academic Administration Department will issue a *Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS)* number to allow the applicant to apply for a Tier 4 visa.

2.5   Appointment of Research Students based outwith the UK

Research students may be permitted to study at a distance from the University due to work or residency commitments overseas. This can include both full-time and part-time study modes. When considering appointing an applicant at a distance, there are a number of factors which the supervisory team must take into consideration:

▪ *Facilities available*. Will the research student have access to an appropriate learning environment and facilities in their home country to undertake the research programme?

▪ *Supervision*. A locally-based Principal Supervisor should be appointed. In addition, a second supervisor based on campus, should assume the role of Study Coordinator. He/she can advise the locally-based supervisor on quality assurance and enhancement issues. Arrangements should be made for frequent and substantial contact, including meetings between the research student and the University supervisor(s), and regular contact between the University supervisor(s) and the locally-based supervisor(s).

▪ *Time spent in Aberdeen.* A research student based outwith the UK is expected to establish close links with the University and maintain regular contact with their supervisory team. This may include telephone and various forms of electronic contact, in addition to attendance at any courses or modules deemed appropriate for the research student's progression.

For research students studying at a distance, potential Principal Supervisors should consider carefully the implications of the following:

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>
> UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2012), Chapter B11: Research Degrees

2.6   Recruitment Process

Individual Application by Candidate
or

Draft Advertisement for Studentship

Application sent to School

School scrutiny of Application

Interview Arrangements

Application/Appointment Checklist (RSAC)

Offer Letter issued

Conditions of Offer Met

Offer Acceptance form completed

Enrolment and Commencement of Study

Attendance at the PgCert Research Methods

1a. Applicant creates account on the online application system.

1b. School contacts Graduate School with draft advertisement and further details of studentship.

2. Graduate School acknowledges receipt of application, which is checked and passed to the School's Research Degrees Coordinator who considers the application in conjunction with *Research Student Application/Appointment Checklist (RSAC)*.

3. Research Degrees Coordinator scrutinises application and identifies appropriate academic member of staff to further evaluate application and arranges interview, where applicable. This can be face-to-face or telephone.

4. School conducts interview and completes a template for upload to the online application system. Unsuccessful candidates at this stage should be rejected via the online application system.

5. After interview, Research Degree Coordinator in discussion with the Principal Supervisor completes electronic *Research Student Application/Appointment Checklist (RSAC)*. The Graduate School is then notified to issue an *Offer Letter*. [1]

6. Graduate School electronically advises applicant on the availability of the *Offer* Letter and any necessary conditions. This document can be downloaded or printed by the applicant. [2]

7. If applicant has satisfied set conditions, this is confirmed by Principal Supervisor and Graduate School as appropriate. Graduate School converts the Offer Letter to unconditional, which the applicant subsequently accepts. [3]

8. Successful applicant completes *Offer Acceptance* form on online application system. In addition, unsuccessful candidates informed by Graduate School. [3]

9. Student enrols with Academic Administration Department and begins induction process.

10. Student commences Postgraduate Certificate Research Methods either in March or November each year.

Notes

(1)   An offer made by Principal Supervisor may only be made on condition that this additional appointment does not result in the Principal Supervisor having in excess of six principal supervisions (refer to Regulation A6: Research Degrees, paragraph 4.5).

(2)   Offer letter retained in online application system for accessing by Research Degrees Coordinator as well as a hard copy sent to Payroll (if a stipend is payable). In addition, this file is uploaded into Document Manager, once the student successfully completes enrolment.

(3)   Offer Acceptance form retained in online application system for accessing by Research Degrees Coordinator. The Graduate School will acknowledge acceptance electronically via SITS. This file is uploaded into Document Manager, once the student successfully completes enrolment.

2.7   Enrolment

Research students are required to enrol as a student of the University on commencement and, thereafter, annually to maintain their enrolled/registered status.

As part of the enrolment procedure, research students are required to formally acknowledge that he/she accepts and will abide by the University Regulations.

2.8   Postgraduate Certificate (PgCert) Research Methods

All research students, unless they can demonstrate appropriate prior learning, are required to enrol on the University's *Postgraduate Certificate (PgCert) Research Methods*. The course provides the research student with a programme of related studies, offering the underpinning and skills required for them to adjust to research activities, gain the necessary competence in research methods and knowledge related to the subject of the thesis, as well as prepare for the registration process. The course has the following objectives:

(i)   to equip the research student with the skills and knowledge necessary to undertake the proposed research;

(ii)   to make available a body of knowledge normally associated with a degree in the subject area of the proposed programme of research;

(iii)   to provide a breadth of knowledge in related subjects.

Unless *Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL)* has been approved, a research student is not permitted to proceed to examination for:

▪   a doctoral degree unless they have successfully completed the Postgraduate Certificate Research Methods; or

▪   a master's degree unless they have successfully completed module 1 of the Postgraduate Certificate Research Methods.

To seek exemption from the *Postgraduate Certificate (PgCert) Research Methods* on the basis of previous research experience, the research student is responsible for making a *Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL)* claim in accordance with Regulation A2: Admission, paragraph 5, and submit this to the Course Management Team.

3. INDUCTION GUIDELINES FOR STUDENTS AND SUPERVISORS

> Indicator 7: Higher education providers define and communicate clearly the responsibilities and entitlements of students undertaking research degree programmes.
>
> Indicator 8: Research students are provided with sufficient information to enable them to begin their studies with an understanding of the environment in which they will be working.
>
> UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2012), Chapter B11: Research Degrees

3.1 Induction

Induction is a joint responsibility of the research student, the Principal Supervisor and the Research Degree Coordinator. Research students are also required to attend a Graduate School induction event, or complete an online induction module.

If the Principal Supervisor is based outwith the University, a Study Coordinator will be appointed to assist in the induction process as well as have regular contact with the research student (see **subsection 4**).

The Graduate School, Academic Administration Department and International Student Advice, Visa and Immigration Service (where appropriate) will also provide support, help and advice during the research student's study period.

To that effect, the aim of the University Induction Programme for research students is to:

▪ enable the research student to complete enrolment and obtain access to the facilities of the University;

▪ encourage the research student to become familiar with the University, their School and its research environment;

▪ help the research student's awareness of their own role and responsibilities;

▪ provide the research student with the information they need to help them become an effective research student as quickly as possible;

▪ adjust to life in the University and Aberdeen.

It is important for the Principal Supervisor, or Study Coordinator if the Principal Supervisor is not based at the University, to spend time at the beginning to help the research student settle in, clarify any issues related to their research and help them acclimatise to their new environment both in the School and across the University.

Induction does not stop at the end of day one. A number of activities should be covered in the first week, but some will be monitored on an ongoing basis, requiring further discussion and follow-up. For example, research students should organise regular review meetings with their Principal Supervisor (see **subsection 3.2**), making use of the *Research Student Progress Log.*

3.2   Research Student Progress Log

It is recommended by the University's Research Degrees Committee that all research students use the *Research Student Progress Log* to record action or bullet points arising out of meetings with the Principal Supervisor.

This acts not only as an *aide memoir* but also as a mechanism for monitoring progress on a regular basis and helps form part of the student learning contract. Both the research student and the Supervisory Team should keep appropriate records of the outcomes of meeting and related activities.

4.   SUPERVISION

Indicator 9: Higher education providers appoint supervisors with the appropriate skills and subject knowledge to support and encourage research students, and to monitor their progress effectively.

Indicator 10: Each research student has a supervisory team containing a main supervisor who is the clearly identified point of contact.

Indicator 11: Higher education providers ensure that the responsibilities of research student supervisors are readily available and clearly communicated to supervisors and students.

Indicator 12: Higher education providers ensure that individual supervisors have sufficient time to carry out their responsibilities effectively.

UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2012), Chapter B11: Research Degrees

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Refer also to Regulation A6: Research Degrees, paragraph 4.

4.1   Responsibilities of the Principal Supervisor

The Principal Supervisor is responsible for supervision of the research student. Where the Principal Supervisor is based within the same School as the research student, the Principal Supervisor will also act as Study Coordinator (see **subsection 4.2**).

At the commencement of the research project, the Principal Supervisor should meet with the research student and cover areas defined in the induction process for research students (see **subsection 3** above). In addition, each School will have its own tailored Induction Programme which will help the research student adjust to academic study.

The Principal Supervisor is the first point of contact for the research student in the early days and should help guide the research project. Some clarification on both expectations and responsibilities of both research student and supervisor should be provided and regular meetings should take place to discuss progress and completion of targets. Research students are advised to use the *Research Student Progress Log* (or equivalent) to record discussion and action points arising from meetings with the Principal Supervisor (see **subsection 3.2**).

As part of the mandatory requirement for research students to undertake the *Postgraduate Certificate (PgCert) Research Methods*, the Principal Supervisor will be required to participate in activities such as assessing student presentations or marking coursework submissions as part of the assessment for the *Postgraduate Certificate (PgCert) Research Methods* course. Principal

Supervisors should also take the opportunity to discuss their research student's progress through the *Postgraduate Certificate (PgCert) Research Methods* course at regular intervals.

4.2   Role of Study Coordinator

Where a Principal Supervisor is not a member of staff within the School or Centre in which the research student is based, or has not supervised a research student to successful completion of a PhD or other doctoral award, a Study Coordinator is appointed from within the School or Centre in which the research student is based, and is part of the research student's supervisory team.

The Study Coordinator is responsible for the day to day adherence to University Regulations and quality assurance procedures, for ensuring effective supervision and communication between the research student and Supervisory Team, and for the dissemination of good practice.

4.3   Responsibilities of the Supervisory Team

The Supervisory Team will be recommended for approval by the relevant School, on behalf of the Research Degrees Committee, in considering a *Research Degree Registration (RDR)* form.

Individual supervisors will bring different skills to the Supervisory Team and will provide support for the research student at appropriate times in the project. It is important that the Supervisory Team's expertise reflects and supports the research student's work. Meetings with other members of the Supervisory Team may be less frequent than those the research student has with the Principal Supervisor, but they should occur at appropriate times to support the project.

All supervisors are required to undertake the University's *Supervisory Training Programme* which assists with the dissemination of good practice. More information on the *Supervisory Training Programme* is available from the Graduate School.

4.4   Role of Advisor

From time to time an advisor, who is usually not based within the University, will be appointed to support the work of the research student. This person may be based in a work or laboratory environment and must agree to appropriate access before being appointed.

4.5   Role of Research Degree Coordinator

Research Degree Coordinators are appointed by respective Heads of School who assign their research students to a Research Degree Coordinator.

At its meeting on 17 March 2010, Academic Council [AC/10/2/1.2] agreed the Research Degree Coordinators role is a responsibility position, to be taken account of through workload planning, with the following tariff based on the number of Research Postgraduate (RPG) students for whom the Coordinator is responsible:

1 – 15 RPG students = 0.1 FTE

16 – 30 RPG students = 0.2 FTE

31 – 45 RPG students = 0.3 FTE, and so on.

Principal Duties

- Working with delegated authority from the Head of School, ensuring effective and regular liaison with the Head of School and Head of the Graduate School.

- In collaboration with the Graduate School, supporting research degree supervision and maintenance of quality assurance, quality enhancement and academic standards in accordance with the roles relating to:

  - Application, Admission, Enrolment;

  - Induction;

  - Supervision;

  - Registration;

  - Transfer;

  - Examination;

  - Monitoring and Evaluation.

- Liaising with the Graduate School, monitoring a research student's adherence to the *Ten Instances of Expected Contact*.

- Contributing to a School's research degree strategy, policies and management through active participation in the Research Degrees Committee.

- Representing the School at relevant University committees and bodies, as appropriate.

- Supporting and promoting links between research and teaching activities.

The Research Degree Coordinator will liaise with the Supervisory Team as appropriate, and is the main point of contact for the Graduate School.

If there is disagreement between the Supervisory Team and the research student, the matter should be referred to the Research Degree Coordinator for resolution in the first instance. Thereafter, any unresolved disagreement may require the involvement of the Head of the Graduate School, or recourse to existing procedures as contained in the Academic Regulations, or the Complaints Handling Procedure. If the disagreement relates to the *Postgraduate Certificate (PgCert) Research Methods*, it may be dealt with under Regulation A3: Student Conduct and Appeals.
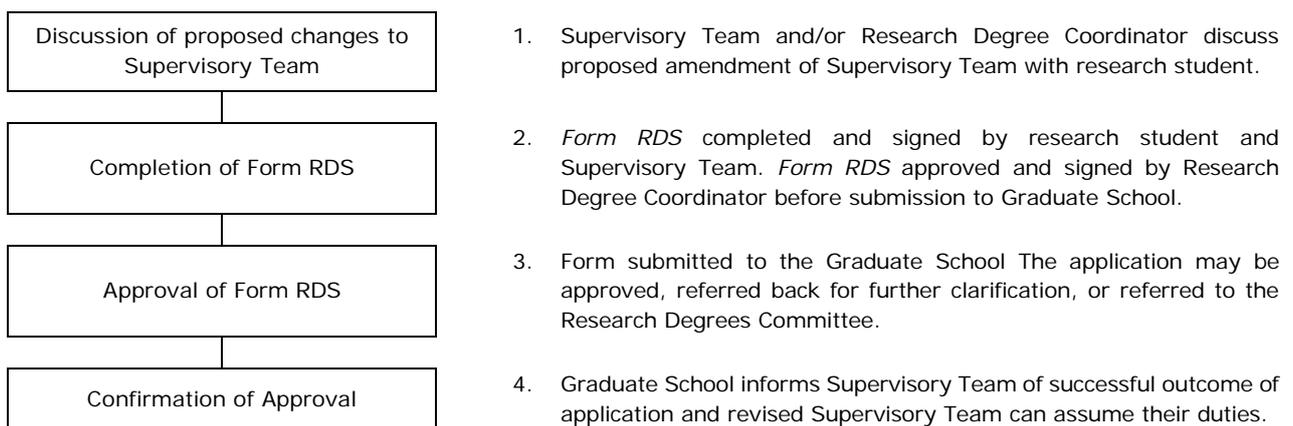
4.6   Change in Supervisory Arrangements

From time to time, it may be necessary to change the supervisory arrangements for a research student. There can be a number of reasons for this such as:

- the current Principal Supervisor leaves the University and does not wish to continue in this role;

- unforeseen or urgent changes, perhaps as a consequence of retiral, long-term ill-health or other extended period of unavailability of the supervisor;

- adjustments are required to the Supervisory Team to take account of the evolution of the research student's research project.

Regulation A6: Research Degrees allows for a Principal Supervisor who has left the University to remain in that post, provided the School appoints a Study Coordinator. This person would be based in the relevant School. Any adjustment to the Supervisory Team requires consultation with the research student and completion of the *Change in Approved Supervision Arrangements (RDS)* form.

In addition, in accordance with Regulation A6: Research Degrees, the proposed team should have a combined experience of supervising not less than two research students to successful completion. Any new proposed member of the Supervisory Team without previous supervisory experience at this University must provide a *Curriculum Vitae (RDCV)* form.

Discussion of proposed changes to Supervisory Team	1. Supervisory Team and/or Research Degree Coordinator discuss proposed amendment of Supervisory Team with research student.
Completion of Form RDS	2. *Form RDS* completed and signed by research student and Supervisory Team. *Form RDS* approved and signed by Research Degree Coordinator before submission to Graduate School.
Approval of Form RDS	3. Form submitted to the Graduate School The application may be approved, referred back for further clarification, or referred to the Research Degrees Committee.
Confirmation of Approval	4. Graduate School informs Supervisory Team of successful outcome of application and revised Supervisory Team can assume their duties.

5. REGISTRATION

Refer also to Regulation A6: Research Degrees, paragraph 5.

5.1 Introduction

All students are required to register for a research degree, as contained in Regulation A6: Research Degrees, paragraph 2.1, within three months of commencement. This applies for both full-time and part-time students.

To assist the research student in the *Research Degree Registration (RDR)* process, students will undertake the *Postgraduate Certificate (PgCert) Research Methods* (see **subsection 2.8** above), delivered in November or March each year, unless they have successfully applied for exemption, due to *Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL)*. This course will assist the research student to focus on their research objectives and help identify which resources and/or facilities they will need to help their programme of research.

5.2   Research Governance and Ethics

Refer also to Regulation A6: Research Degrees, paragraph 5.2.

5.2.1   Introduction

All research students are required to consider the implications of good research governance and ethical conduct in their research practice, and the University requires all researchers to consider the importance of promoting good ethical practice in the conduct of academic research. The University's Research Ethics Policy is intended to:

- provide standards to protect individuals and groups;

- educate staff, students and any interested parties;

- provide a clear understanding of the mechanisms the University employs to internally review its practices and activities in relation to research.

For further information refer to the University's Research Governance and Integrity Policy and Research Ethics Policy.

5.2.2   General Principles of Research Ethics

All research students should consider carefully the impact of the following principles on their individual research:

- impact of research on society;

- value of their research;

- conflict of interest, perceived or actual;

- acquisition of informed consent;

- participants should be genuinely willing to participate;

- participants should be fully aware of the aims of your research;

- right of participant confidentiality;

- publication of research findings.

The flowchart in **subsection 5.2.3** below is designed to assist research students in considering ethical issues as part of the registration process. However, research students should review ethical issues on an ongoing basis, not just at registration, and particularly at the transfer (**subsection 7**) or monitoring stage (**subsection 6**), if appropriate.

5.2.3   Adhering to Research Ethics Procedures

The following flowchart is intended to provide guidance on the University procedure in respect of research students, but it is strongly advised that all research students discuss ethical issues with their Principal Supervisor before seeking ethical approval from the University or other external body, as appropriate.

All research students should complete the *Research Ethics: Student and Supervisor Assessment (RESSA)* form. This form, once signed, should be appended to the research student's *Research Degree Registration (RDR)* form for submission to the Graduate School. In addition, if the

research student wishes to undertake work involving human participants under the age of 16 in the UK, they will require to submit a recent Disclosure Scotland Form with their application.

Initial consideration of ethical issues	1. Research student undertakes Module 1 of *Postgraduate Certificate (PgCert) Research Methods* to help establish framework to consider ethical issues, and discusses implications with Principal Supervisor.
Completion of RESSA form	2. Research student completes and signs *Research Ethics: Student and Supervisor Assessment (RESSA)* form. Principal Supervisor signs *RESSA* form. Research student's Disclosure Scotland approval appended if appropriate.
Submission and consideration of RDR and RESSA forms by Graduate School	3. Once approved at School level, research student submits signed *RESSA* form with *RDR* form to the Graduate School. The Head of the Graduate School considers application: may approve; seek further clarification; or refer application to Research Integrity and Ethics Sub-Committee.
Approval of Application	4. Once approved, research student and Principal Supervisor receive written confirmation of approval and that research can commence.
Ongoing Review of Research Ethical Issues	5. Research student in discussion with Supervisory Team monitors ethical issues on ongoing basis and resubmits *RESSA Form* as appropriate.

5.3   Registration Procedure

Before completing the *Research Degree Registration (RDR)* form, research students and the Supervisory Team are advised to read the guidance notes that accompany the *Research Degree Registration (RDR)* form.
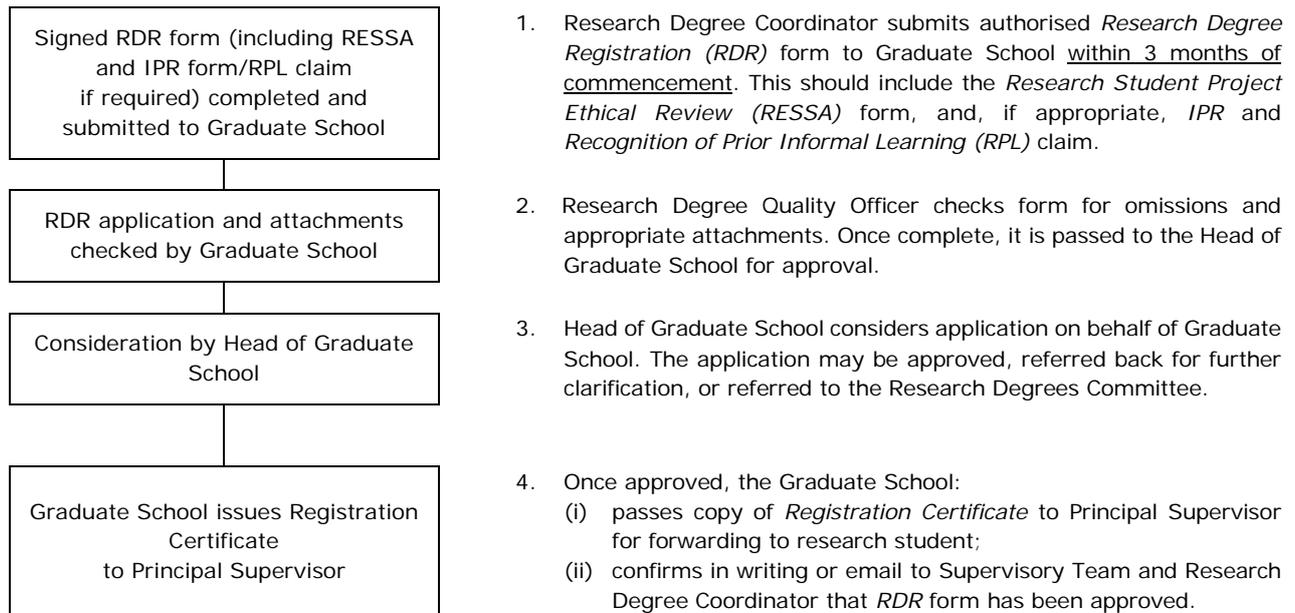
Both the research student and Supervisory Team should be familiar with Regulation A6: Research Degrees before completing any registration documentation. The *Research Degree Registration (RDR)* form should be completed jointly by the research student and his/her Supervisory Team, but final responsibility for correct completion lies with the Principal Supervisor and the Supervisory Team. If any proposed supervisor has not supervised an RGU research degree student before, he/she must submit a *Curriculum Vitae (RDCV)* form as part of the registration application.

As part of the induction process, all research students should be familiar with the University's Research Ethics Policy and have discussed any relevant issues with their Principal Supervisor (**subsection 5.3** above). As a result of considering ethical issues, all research students must complete the *Research Ethics: Student and Supervisor Assessment (RESSA)* form and append this to the *Research Degree Registration (RDR)* form on submission. In addition, students should submit the signed IPR agreement with their registration documents. If this is not provided, an explanation must be provided in section 2.7 of the *Research Degree Registration (RDR)* form.

The completed *Research Degree Registration (RDR)* form, together with all supporting documentation, must be submitted to the Graduate School, within three months of commencing.

Once the submission is considered by the Head of the Graduate School, the Graduate School will confirm to the Principal Supervisor if the application is approved or requires amendment or clarification. When the form is finally approved, a copy of the *Registration Certificate* is forwarded to the Principal Supervisor for distribution to the research student. The student's

approved registration application together with the certificate is then stored in *Document Manager*.

Signed RDR form (including RESSA and IPR form/RPL claim if required) completed and submitted to Graduate School	1. Research Degree Coordinator submits authorised *Research Degree Registration (RDR)* form to Graduate School <u>within 3 months of commencement</u>. This should include the *Research Student Project Ethical Review (RESSA)* form, and, if appropriate, *IPR* and *Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL)* claim.
RDR application and attachments checked by Graduate School	2. Research Degree Quality Officer checks form for omissions and appropriate attachments. Once complete, it is passed to the Head of Graduate School for approval.
Consideration by Head of Graduate School	3. Head of Graduate School considers application on behalf of Graduate School. The application may be approved, referred back for further clarification, or referred to the Research Degrees Committee.
Graduate School issues Registration Certificate to Principal Supervisor	4. Once approved, the Graduate School: (i) passes copy of *Registration Certificate* to Principal Supervisor for forwarding to research student; (ii) confirms in writing or email to Supervisory Team and Research Degree Coordinator that *RDR* form has been approved.

5.4 Extension of Period of Registration

Refer also to Regulation A6: Research Degrees, paragraph 5.3.5.

Research students are expected to complete their studies within the maximum period of registration as defined in Regulation A6: Research Degrees. If the maximum period of registration is exceeded, the research student may apply for an exceptional extension of up to 12 months. Approval of any request rests with the Research Degrees Committee, but the research student should discuss their application with the Principal Supervisor and Research Degree Coordinator before completion of the *Extension of Registration Period (RDExt)* form.

There may be a number of valid reasons to request an extension such as:

- research project taking an unexpected change of direction with associated time implications;

- unanticipated equipment or laboratory problems outwith the control of the research student;

- research student is close to submission of thesis for viva and has just exceeded the maximum registration period;

- any other valid reason.

Research students should also ensure that they have paid all due debts to the University (such as writing-up fees), be registered for the session, and have honoured their learning contract (such as completion of *Annual Progress Report (RSR)* form), before applying for an extension.
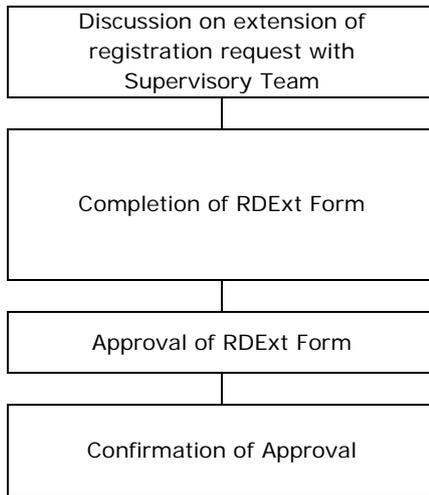
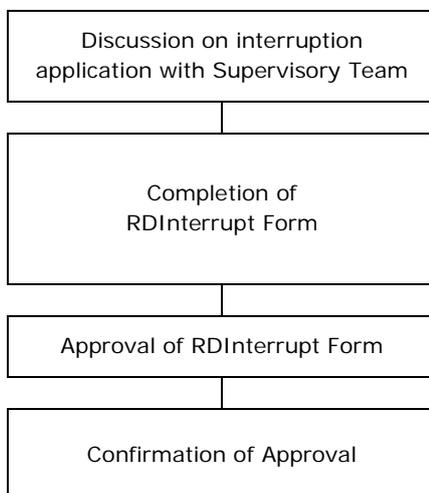|	
Discussion on extension of registration request with Supervisory Team	1. Research student discusses reasons behind request with Supervisory Team and/or Research Degree Coordinator.
Completion of RDExt Form	2. Research student completes sections 1, 2, 3 and 8 of *Extension of Registration Period (RDExt)* form and submits to Principal Supervisor. *RDExt* form signed off by the Supervisory Team. Form also requires signature and approval of Research Degree Coordinator before form is submitted to Graduate School.
Approval of RDExt Form	3. The application may be approved, referred back for further clarification, or referred to the Research Degrees Committee.
Confirmation of Approval	4. Graduate School informs Supervisory Team and research student of successful outcome of application and confirms 'effective from' date.

5.5   Authorised Interruption of Registration

If a research student is prevented, by ill-health or other valid cause, from making progress with the research, the registration may be interrupted by the Research Degrees Committee, normally for not more than one year at a time.

The research student should discuss the circumstances behind the request with their Principal Supervisor and Research Degree Coordinator in the first instance and seek advice from the Graduate School.

If, after discussion the research student feels that an interruption of registration is appropriate, they should complete an *Authorised Interruption of Registration (RDInterrupt)* form. This should then be passed to the Supervisory Team and Research Degree Coordinator for approval. The form is then submitted to the Graduate School where arrangements will be made to have the form approved at the next meeting of the Research Degrees Committee.

The following flowchart illustrates the process involved:

Discussion on interruption application with Supervisory Team	1. Research student discusses reasons behind request with Supervisory Team and/or Research Degree Coordinator. Advice can also be sought from Graduate School.
Completion of RDInterrupt Form	2. Research student completes sections 1-3 of *Interruption of Registration (RDInterrupt)* form and submits to Principal Supervisor. *RDInterrupt* form signed by Supervisory Team, Research Degree Coordinator before submission to Graduate School.
Approval of RDInterrupt Form	3. The application may be approved, referred back for further clarification, or referred to the Research Degrees Committee.
Confirmation of Approval	4. Graduate School informs Supervisory Team and research student of successful outcome of the application and suspension of registration takes effect.

5.6   Withdrawal of Registration

A research student may choose not to complete their studies and wish to withdraw his/her registration. The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) requires the University to record the reason for withdrawal as follows:
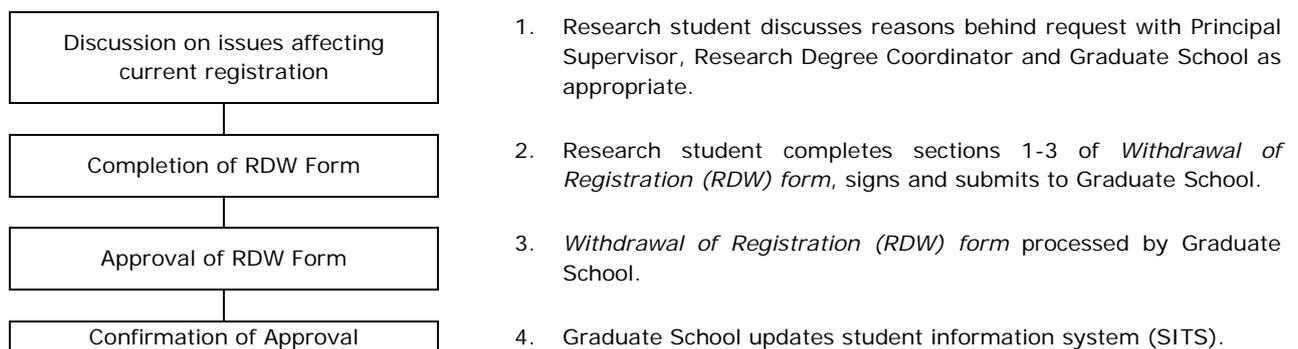
- transferred to another institution (code 03);

- health reasons (code 04);

- financial reasons (code 06);

- other personal reasons and dropped out (code 07);

- gone into employment (code 10);

- any other valid reason (code 11);

- unknown (code 99).

In any case, the research student should discuss their proposed withdrawal with both the Principal Supervisor, Research Degrees Coordinator and the Graduate School, to ascertain if the University can assist in any way. If, after discussions, the position remains the same the applicant must complete the *Withdrawal of Registration (RDW)* form.

The *Withdrawal of Registration (RDW)* form is forwarded to the Graduate School who will then undertake to inform the Academic Administration and Financial Services Departments.

If the research student's circumstances change at some point in the future, completion of the *Withdrawal of Registration (RDW)* form does not preclude an applicant re-applying to the University.

The following flowchart illustrates the process involved:

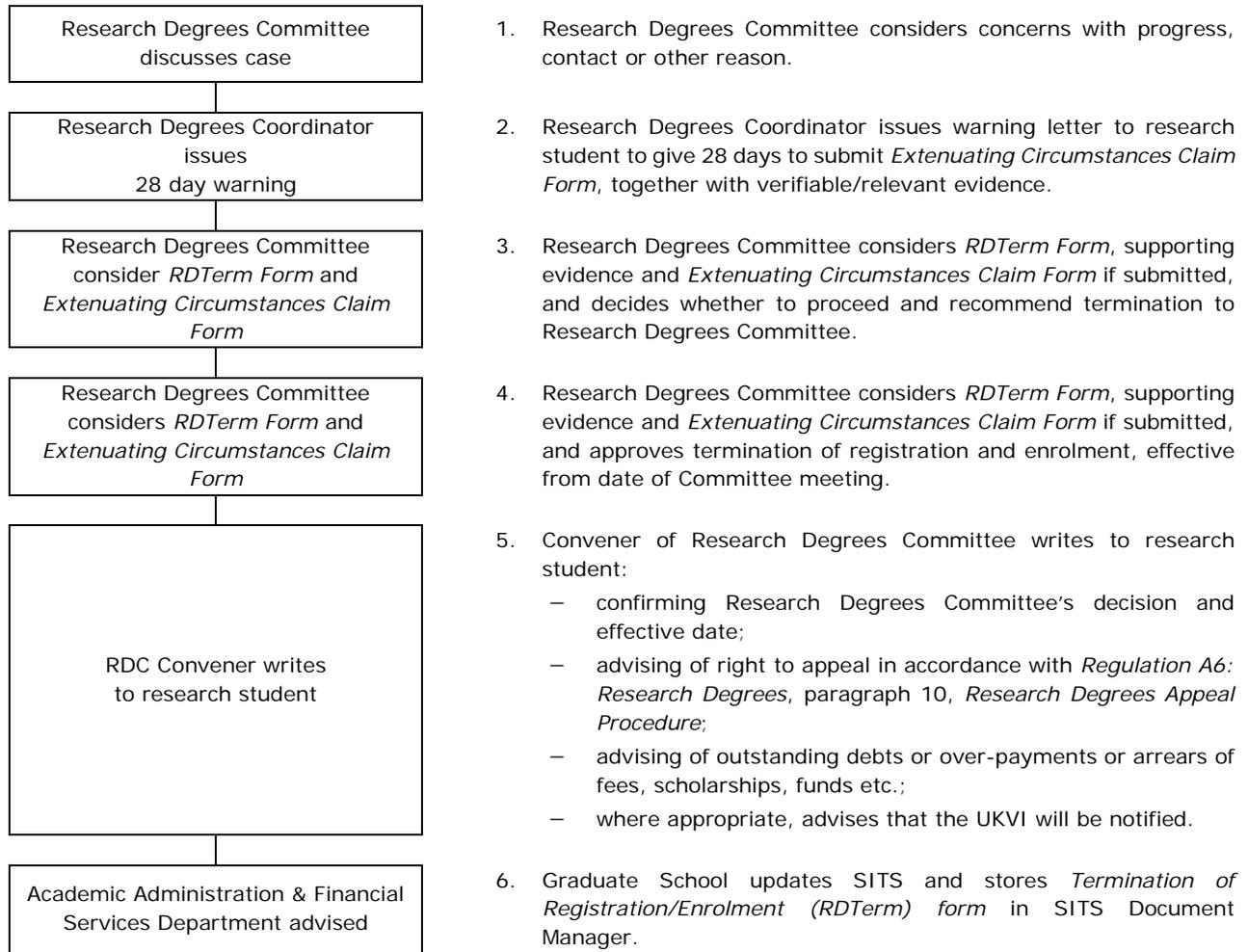|	
Discussion on issues affecting current registration	1. Research student discusses reasons behind request with Principal Supervisor, Research Degree Coordinator and Graduate School as appropriate.
Completion of RDW Form	2. Research student completes sections 1-3 of *Withdrawal of Registration (RDW) form*, signs and submits to Graduate School.
Approval of RDW Form	3. *Withdrawal of Registration (RDW) form* processed by Graduate School.
Confirmation of Approval	4. Graduate School updates student information system (SITS).

5.7   Termination of Registration and Enrolment

A research student is obliged to meet the requirements of the University both in respect of expected contact throughout the period of registration (Schedule 6.2 of *Regulation A6: Research Degrees* refers), and of making satisfactory progress.

Where a School and/or supervisory team have concerns with the progress of a research student and/or is unable to communicate with the research student for a period exceeding two months (or for such other period as required by the *UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI)* service), the School shall seek the approval of the Research Degrees Committee to terminate the research

student's registration and enrolment, through the completion of a *Termination of Registration/Enrolment (RDTerm) Form.*

The following flowchart illustrates the process involved:

Flowchart	Description
Research Degrees Committee discusses case	1. Research Degrees Committee considers concerns with progress, contact or other reason.
Research Degrees Coordinator issues 28 day warning	2. Research Degrees Coordinator issues warning letter to research student to give 28 days to submit *Extenuating Circumstances Claim Form*, together with verifiable/relevant evidence.
Research Degrees Committee consider *RDTerm Form* and *Extenuating Circumstances Claim Form*	3. Research Degrees Committee considers *RDTerm Form*, supporting evidence and *Extenuating Circumstances Claim Form* if submitted, and decides whether to proceed and recommend termination to Research Degrees Committee.
Research Degrees Committee considers *RDTerm Form* and *Extenuating Circumstances Claim Form*	4. Research Degrees Committee considers *RDTerm Form*, supporting evidence and *Extenuating Circumstances Claim Form* if submitted, and approves termination of registration and enrolment, effective from date of Committee meeting.
RDC Convener writes to research student	5. Convener of Research Degrees Committee writes to research student: – confirming Research Degrees Committee's decision and effective date; – advising of right to appeal in accordance with *Regulation A6: Research Degrees*, paragraph 10, *Research Degrees Appeal Procedure*; – advising of outstanding debts or over-payments or arrears of fees, scholarships, funds etc.; – where appropriate, advises that the UKVI will be notified.
Academic Administration & Financial Services Department advised	6. Graduate School updates SITS and stores *Termination of Registration/Enrolment (RDTerm) form* in SITS Document Manager.

The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) requires the University to record the reason for termination as follows:

- academic failure/left in bad standing/not permitted to progress (code 02);

- written off after lapse of time (code 08);

- exclusion (code 09);

The Research Degrees Committee shall report annually to Academic Council on terminations.

6.   MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Indicator 13: Higher education providers put in place clearly defined mechanisms for monitoring and supporting research student progress, including formal and explicit reviews of progress at different stages. Research students, supervisors and other relevant staff are made aware of progress monitoring mechanisms, including the importance of keeping appropriate records of the outcomes of meetings and related activities.

Indicator 14: Research students have appropriate opportunities for developing research, personal and professional skills. Each research student's development needs are identified and agreed jointly by the student and appropriate staff at the start of the degree; these are regularly reviewed and updated as appropriate.

Indicator 15: Higher education providers put in place mechanisms to collect, review and respond as appropriate to evaluations from those concerned with research degrees, including individual research students and groups of research students or their representatives. Evaluations are considered openly and constructively and the results are communicated appropriately.

<div align="right">UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2012), Chapter B11: Research Degrees</div>

Refer also to Regulation A6: Research Degrees, paragraph 6.

6.1   Introduction

There are a number of ways in which the University, under the auspices of the Research Degrees Committee, monitors the progress of research students, descriptions of which follow. All students, unless they are on a temporary interruption of registration, are expected to complete the tasks at the appropriate time each year, regardless of mode of study or location.
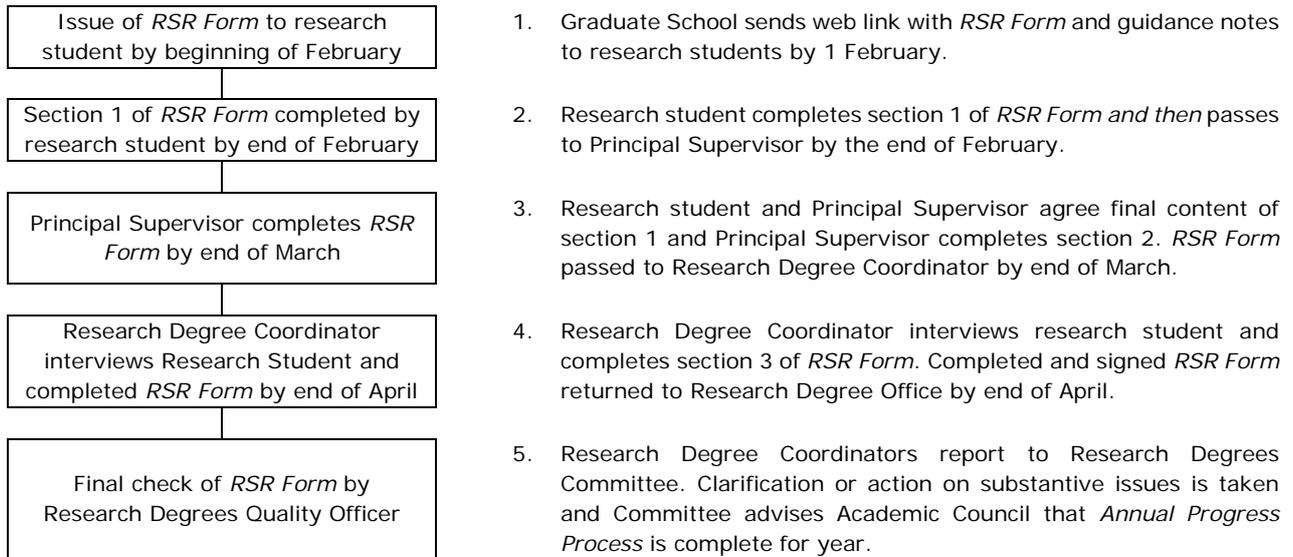
In addition to the obligations for students specified in Regulation A3: Student Conduct and Appeals, paragraph 4, the research student is also obliged to meet the requirements of the University both in respect of expected contact throughout the period of registration, as specified in Regulation A6: Research Degrees, Schedule 6.2), and of making satisfactory progress, as specified in the offer letter issued to the research degree applicant.

6.2   Annual Monitoring Progress Report (RSR)

Annually all currently enrolled research students are given instructions to access an *Annual Progress Report (RSR)* form to complete and forward to their Principal Supervisor by the end of February. The *Annual Progress Report (RSR)* form includes a self-assessment by the research student, and a supplementary section is completed by the Principal Supervisor by the end of March. The *Annual Progress Report (RSR)* form is designed to record how the research student is progressing with the programme of research, and allow the Supervisory Team to comment on any progress problems.

Thereafter, the Research Degree Coordinator, or appropriate alternative, is required to interview the research student; if the research student is studying at a distance, the interview may be conducted by telephone. An appropriate alternative must have supervisory experience and be independent of the Supervisory Team. The Research Degree Coordinator is required to have interviewed the research student and completed *Annual Progress Report (RSR)* form by the end of April.

The *Annual Progress Report (RSR)* form is then reviewed by the Research Degrees Committee in September, which may approve it, refer it back to the relevant School for further clarification or, exceptionally, refer the substantive issues to the Research Degrees Committee for further consideration.
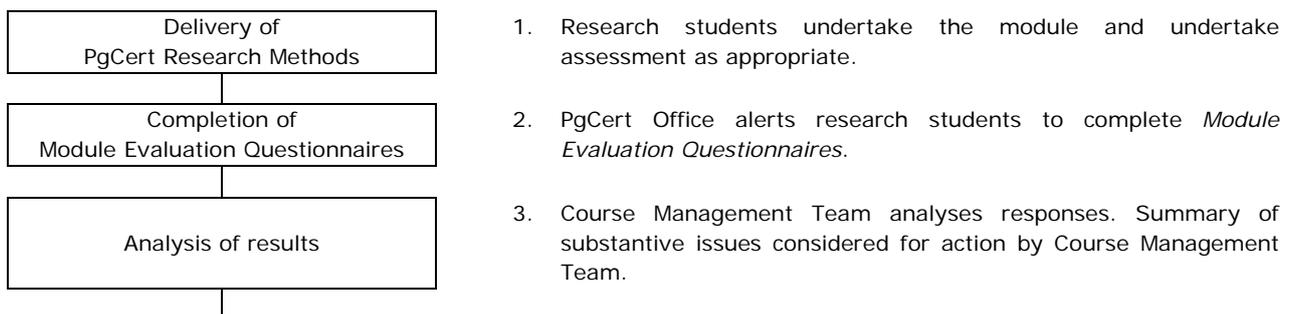
Issue of *RSR Form* to research student by beginning of February	1. Graduate School sends web link with *RSR Form* and guidance notes to research students by 1 February.
Section 1 of *RSR Form* completed by research student by end of February	2. Research student completes section 1 of *RSR Form and then* passes to Principal Supervisor by the end of February.
Principal Supervisor completes *RSR Form* by end of March	3. Research student and Principal Supervisor agree final content of section 1 and Principal Supervisor completes section 2. *RSR Form* passed to Research Degree Coordinator by end of March.
Research Degree Coordinator interviews Research Student and completed *RSR Form* by end of April	4. Research Degree Coordinator interviews research student and completes section 3 of *RSR Form*. Completed and signed *RSR Form* returned to Research Degree Office by end of April.
Final check of *RSR Form* by Research Degrees Quality Officer	5. Research Degree Coordinators report to Research Degrees Committee. Clarification or action on substantive issues is taken and Committee advises Academic Council that *Annual Progress Process* is complete for year.

In addition to the annual completion of the *Annual Progress Report (RSR)* form, the Research Degrees Committee recommends the *Annual Progress Report (RSR)* form is completed informally on a six-monthly basis, normally between December and February as an interim review. Research Degree Coordinators and Heads of School are requested to review these interim *RSR* forms and to take any actions as a result of the issues raised by either the research student or the supervisor as appropriate.

6.3   Module Evaluation Questionnaire

All research students undertake the *Postgraduate Certificate (PgCert) Research Methods* unless exemption for *Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL)* has been granted (**subsection 2.8**) by the Research Degrees Committee as part of their registration application.

As part of continuous improvements to the course and student learning experience, all research students are given the opportunity to complete a *Module Evaluation Questionnaire* after completion of each module. After the closing date for responses, the *Questionnaires* are then analysed in depth by the Course Management Team and the findings are reported to the Research Degrees Committee.

Delivery of PgCert Research Methods	1. Research students undertake the module and undertake assessment as appropriate.
Completion of Module Evaluation Questionnaires	2. PgCert Office alerts research students to complete *Module Evaluation Questionnaires*.
Analysis of results	3. Course Management Team analyses responses. Summary of substantive issues considered for action by Course Management Team.

| |
|---|
| Meeting of Research Degrees Committee |

4. Research Degrees Committee considers reports from Course Management Team, together with analysis of feedback from Module Evaluation Questionnaire incorporated into Annual Course Appraisal (PgCert Research Methods). Any necessary actions identified, persons/Departments informed. Research Degrees Committee confirms to Academic Council that Annual Appraisal Process has been completed.

6.4   End of Year 1 Questionnaire

All research students who have commenced study in the previous session will be invited to complete an electronic questionnaire as part of their assessment of their student learning experience. The issues are analysed by the Research Degrees Quality Officer and a summary report is then forwarded to the Research Degrees Committee for consideration. Any decisions, actions or issues arising are fed back to the research student community by the Graduate School.

Completion of *Year 1 Questionnaire*
Analysis of Questionnaire
Meeting of Research Degrees Committee
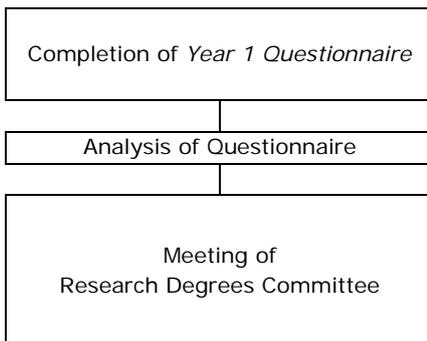
1. Research students who have commenced study in the previous session invited electronically by Graduate School to complete *Year 1 Questionnaire*.

2. Analysis undertaken by the Research Degrees Quality Officer.

3. Research Degrees Committee considers summary report of *Year 1 Questionnaires*. Any necessary actions identified, persons/ Departments informed. Minutes available on web for research students to access. Research Degrees Committee confirms to Academic Council that all substantive issues addressed.

6.5   Submission of Thesis Questionnaire

Once a research student has submitted their thesis and received a letter from the Graduate School confirming their viva outcome, they will be invited to complete a questionnaire to reflect on their complete learning experience. The issues are analysed by the Research Degrees Quality Officer and an annual summary report is then forwarded to the Research Degrees Committee for consideration. Any decisions, actions or issues arising are fed back to the research student community by the Graduate School.

Submission of Thesis to Graduate School
Questionnaire Issued
Analysis of questionnaire
Meeting of Research Degrees Committee
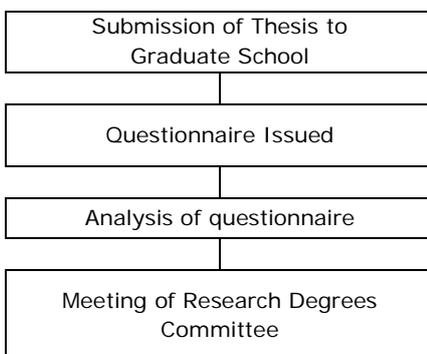
1. Research student submits final draft of thesis to Graduate School.

2. Questionnaire issued to research student together with viva outcome letter.

3. Analysis undertaken by the Research Degrees Quality Officer.

4. Research Degrees Committee considers summary report of Submission of Thesis Questionnaires and confirms to Academic Council all substantive issues addressed.

6.6   Research Student Liaison Group

At least three times a year, the Convener of the Research Degrees Committee and Graduate School will organise an informal meeting with School-based research student representatives,

to discuss current issues affecting the community as well as reflect on positive achievements. Proposed actions arising from these meetings will be submitted to the Research Degrees Committee for consideration and approval, as appropriate.

6.7   Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES)

The University participates in the biennial *Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES)* [www.heacademy.ac.uk/PRES]. Analysis of the results, including benchmarking University data with the sector aggregate and specific benchmark groups, is considered in detail by the Research Degrees Committee, and informs the *Research Degree Appraisal* process.

Further information is available from the Graduate School.

6.8   Research Degree Appraisal

The Graduate School, in collaboration with Research Degree Coordinators, completes a *Research Degree Appraisal Overview* annually, which covers the following:

▪ Statistical Data [census date 31 July]: provided by the Graduate School;

▪ *Previous Research Degree Appraisal Overviews*: comment on issues outstanding from previous *Research Degree Appraisal Overviews*, providing a summary of any subsequent action taken/proposed. Identify any recurring issues and preferred actions to address these;

▪ *Student Achievement and Progression*: reflecting on the statistical data provided in section 1 and issues raised in students' *Annual Progress Reports*, highlight and comment on any significant and/or recurring issues and preferred actions to address these;

▪ *Student Learning Experience*: reflecting on the analysis of data from the *Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES)*, and information from students' *Annual Progress Reports*, external examiners' comments and *Evaluation Questionnaires*, comment on any significant and/or recurring issues and preferred actions to address these;

▪ *Standards*: reflecting, in particular, on issues raised in external examiners' comments, and internal and external comparators, as appropriate, comment on any significant and/or recurring issues and preferred actions to address these;

▪ *Resources*: comment on the environment and infrastructure supporting research students which require action/attention, and reflect on the extent to which this has been dependent on external funding;

▪ *Organisation and Operation*: comment on the organisation and/or operation of research degree support within each Graduate School/School/Centre, and across the University;

▪ *Collaboration*: comment on any significant and/or recurring issues arising from collaborative relationships (if appropriate), and preferred actions to address these issues;

▪ *Staff Development*: comment on new developments and/or gaps identified in terms of supporting the learning opportunities/experience and employability of research students making reference, where appropriate, to external comparators (e.g. *Researcher Development Framework* [www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/234301/Researcher-Development-Framework.html], *Research Concordat* [www.researchconcordat.ac.uk];

- *Dissemination of Good Practice/Innovation*: identify any examples of good practice/innovation which are worthy of wider dissemination;

- *Enhancement Activities*: identify proposed enhancement activities for implementation next session (in respect of all sections covered in the *Research Degree Appraisal Overview*);

- *Risk to Future Quality and Standards*: identify issues which might threaten the academic quality or standards (and which cannot be mitigated at Graduate School level) which should be brought to the attention of the Research Degrees Committee or University;

- *Confirmation of Actions*: actions planned or undertaken by the Graduate School, issues suggested for action by the Research Degrees Committee, and issues suggested for action by the University.

The *Research Degree Appraisal Overview* is considered and endorsed by the relevant Research Degrees Committee, prior to its submission to the Research Degrees Committee. The outcomes of all monitoring and evaluation processes relating to research degrees are reported to Academic Council in an annual report in December of each year.

7.   TRANSFER OF REGISTRATION TO DOCTORAL DEGREE

> Indicator 16: Higher education providers that are research degree awarding bodies use criteria for assessing research degrees that enable them to define their academic standards and the achievements of their graduates. The criteria used to assess research degrees are clear and readily available to research students, staff and examiners.
> UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2012), Chapter B11: Research Degrees

Refer also to Regulation A6: Research Degrees, paragraph 7.

7.1   The Transfer Process

After 12 months of full-time study or approximately 24 months of part-time study those research students who registered initially for a master's degree with possibility of transfer to PhD or a professional doctorate, should apply for transfer to doctorate level using the *Transfer of Registration (RDT)* form. As part of the transfer process, students are required to:

- submit a *Transfer Proposal (TP)* form for approval (see **subsection 7.2**);

- review ethical issues, update and submit the *Research Ethics: Student and Supervisor Assessment (RESSA)* form to demonstrate ethical review of their current research design (see **subsection 5.2.3**);

- have successfully completed the *Postgraduate Certificate (PgCert) Research Methods*, by the time the transfer is considered for approval, unless otherwise granted exemption, and providing a copy of the PgCert Research Methods module 2 coursework and grade sheet (see **subsection 2.8**);

- submit a detailed Time Plan for completion of their doctorate;

- successfully complete the oral assessment (see **subsection 7.3**).

7.2 Transfer Proposal

The *Transfer Proposal (TP)* includes the following sections:

▪ Review of Ethics (with a reviewed *Research Ethics: Student and Supervisor Appraisal (RESSA)* form appended to the proposal);

▪ Overview of Progress since PgCert Research Methods module 2 assessment;

▪ Statement of Originality and Impact;

▪ Feasibility of Research Methods (with a detailed Time Plan appended to the proposal).

The *Transfer Proposal* may be accompanied by a portfolio of other relevant material such as visual materials, video or artefacts that can demonstrate the argument/hypothesis through means other than text.

The *Transfer Proposal* will be assessed by an Independent Assessor (appointed by the Research Degree Coordinator), who together will form the Assessment Team. This assessment will be recorded in section 2 of the *Transfer of Registration (RDT)* form.

7.3 Oral Assessment

The oral assessment is organised and convened by the Research Degree Coordinator (or approved alternative), and will be conducted within an appropriate setting to be determined by the School. The team assessing the student application will consist of the Independent Assessor and Research Degrees Coordinator. This assessment will be recorded in section 3 of the *Transfer of Registration (RDT)* form.

The Independent Assessor can be either a member of University staff or external to the University and should have experience in the general area of the research student's project. The Principal Supervisor may attend the oral assessment, but does not form part of the assessment team.

The purpose of the oral assessment is for the research student to articulate and defend work in progress as well as justify future development. In particular, the oral assessment will seek to confirm the student:

▪ understands the purpose and focus of the research, and has achieved sufficient underpinning knowledge to proceed with the research;

▪ is familiar with and understands the associated literature, and can describe work already underway and indicate its significance;

▪ has demonstrated capability to conduct the research, and can appraise problems critically;

▪ has a realistic research plan and schedule aiming towards completion within the period of registration.

The *Transfer of Registration (RDT)* form records whether or not the research student has successfully completed the transfer application or not and the final outcome is recorded in section 4 of the form. The *Assessment Criteria* used for the oral assessment for transfer are available from the Graduate School's *CampusMoodle* area.

If the first attempt is unsuccessful, the *Transfer of Registration (RDT)* form must be completed and sent to the Graduate School, and thereafter submitted to the Research Degrees Committee for consideration. One further opportunity only is permitted.

7.4   Application for Transfer

The completed *Transfer of Registration (RDT)* form should be submitted to the Graduate School by the Research Degree Coordinator for consideration by the Convener of the Research Degrees Committee. The *Transfer of Registration (RDT)* form should be accompanied by:

- the Transfer Proposal (TP) Form;

- revised *Research Ethics: Student and Supervisor Assessment (RESSA)* form;

- Postgraduate Certificate Research Methods module 2 coursework and grade sheet;

- submit a detailed Time Plan for completion of the doctorate.

7.5   Transfer Approval

Once the transfer is approved by the Research Degrees Committee, a copy of the approved minute extract confirming the transfer is issued to the Principal Supervisor for distribution to the research student and the transfer application is uploaded to Document Manager by the Graduate School.

If the transfer is not approved after a second attempt, the Supervisory Team will provide guidance on how the research student can submit for an MSc by Research or MRes award, which will include the submission of a thesis and successful completion of an oral assessment. The University has prepared *Assessment Criteria* for the award of MSc by Research/MRes.

7.6   Transfer Flowchart

Flowchart	Notes
Module 1 of PgCert Research Methods successfully completed	1. Research student retains copy of feedback sheet as evidence of successful completion of module.
Research student completes and submits *Transfer Proposal*	2. Research student completes *Transfer Proposal* and submits to Research Degree Coordinator (or approved alternative) for dissemination to Assessment Team.
Independent Assessor appointed	3. Independent Assessor selected by the Research Degree Coordinator in discussion with Principal Supervisor.
Oral Assessment and RDT Form completed	4. Independent Assessor completes assessment of student's *Transfer Proposal* and agrees it with Research Degrees Coordinator prior to oral assessment. Research student undertakes oral assessment. *RDT Form* completed for each attempt.
RDT Form submitted to Graduate School	5. Research Degree Coordinator submits *RDT application* in accordance with **subsection 7.1** to Graduate School.
Documents checked by Research Degrees Quality Officer	6. Research Degrees Quality Officer checks *RDT application* and advises Research Degree Coordinator accordingly.

Research Degrees Committee Convener considers RDT Form
Principal Supervisor informed of outcome
Principal Supervisor informs research student of outcome

7. The application may be approved, referred back for further clarification, or referred to the Research Degrees Committee.

8. Graduate School advises Principal Supervisor of successful outcome. RDT application is then stored in SITS Document Manager.

9. Principal Supervisor advises research student of successful outcome and feedback from RDT form to research student.

8. WRITING-UP OF THESIS

Refer also to Regulation A6: Research Degrees, paragraph 5.4.

Research students who have been enrolled for three years full-time (or part-time equivalent) are required to pay a continuation fee for the final year of their study, when they embark on the writing-up stage. The writing-up fee must be paid at the point of re-enrolment, on the anniversary of the research student's original enrolment, and at the beginning of the writing-up period. The fee covers the full session. This acts as continued confirmation of the research student's registration and is part of the research student's learning contract.

On payment of this fee, the research student receives a University enrolment card which allows them access to University sites, IT resources and the Library.

If the Research Degrees Committee exceptionally extends a research student's registration for a maximum of one additional year beyond the normal registration period, a writing-up fee for that session will also be payable, although it will be at a higher rate.

During the time of writing-up, students will still be expected to undertake annual monitoring activities (**subsection 6**) such as completion of the *Annual Progress Report (RSR)* form in May each year and continue to maintain contact with their Supervisory Team. If these tasks are not undertaken at appropriate times, the research student's registration with the University could be terminated by the Research Degrees Committee (**subsection 5.7**).

9. EXAMINATION

Indicator 16: Higher education providers that are research degree awarding bodies use criteria for assessing research degrees that enable them to define their academic standards and the achievements of their graduates. The criteria used to assess research degrees are clear and readily available to research students, staff and examiners.

Indicator 17: Research degree final assessment procedures are clear and are operated rigorously, fairly, and consistently. They include input from an external examiner and are carried out to a reasonable timescale. Assessment procedures are communicated clearly to research students, supervisors and examiners.

UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2012), Chapter B11: Research Degrees

Refer also to Regulation A6: Research Degrees, paragraph 9.

9.1 Introduction

As part of examination preparation, students will receive discipline-specific training arranged by their Principal Supervisor prior to examination.

The degree of MSc/MRes or MPhil shall be awarded to a research student who, having critically investigated and evaluated an approved topic and demonstrated an understanding of research methods appropriate to the field of study, has presented and defended a thesis, by oral defence (or approved alternative), to the satisfaction of the examiners.

The degree of PhD and professional doctorates shall be awarded to a research student who, having critically investigated and evaluated an approved topic resulting in an independent and original contribution to knowledge and demonstrated an understanding of research methods appropriate to the field of study, has presented and defended a thesis, by oral defence (or approved alternative), to the satisfaction of the examiners.

The University has prepared *Assessment Criteria* for the awards of MSc by Research/MRes, MPhil and doctorates.

The examination of research degrees involves:

▪ the submission and assessment of a thesis; and

▪ the oral defence of the thesis by oral defence (or approved alternative).

The oral defence (or approved alternative) shall be conducted in English, except with the specific and prior permission of the Research Degrees Committee. It shall normally be held in the United Kingdom. Exceptionally, the Research Degrees Committee may give approval for the examination to take place outwith the United Kingdom.

A research student shall not be permitted to proceed to a further stage of the examination for the degree until the examiners for the *Postgraduate Certificate (PgCert) Research Methods* are satisfied with the research student's performance.

9.2 Examination Arrangements

It is the responsibility of the research student's Study Coordinator (who is normally the Principal Supervisor unless that person is based outwith the University) to formulate the arrangements for the research student's examination. These arrangements are recorded on the *Examination Arrangements (RDE)* form. The application must be supported by *Curriculum Vitae (RDCV)* forms for all examiners regardless of previous examining experience at the Robert Gordon University and must be submitted to the Graduate School, **at least three months** prior to the anticipated date of submission of the thesis. A research student may not submit their thesis until the examination team has been approved by the Research Degrees Committee.

An examination team will normally consist of an external examiner, and an internal examiner who is a member of staff not associated with the research student's supervisory team. Any variation from this composition shall require the prior approval of the Research Degrees Committee.

For a research student who is a member of staff, two external examiners and one internal examiner are appointed.

As part of the University's licence to sponsor international students to come to the UK under the *UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI)* service's Tier 4 of the *Points Based System*, all proposed external examiners must provide an electronic scan of the passport photo page and front cover as evidence of their right to work in the UK. This must be provided as part of the examination arrangements approval and will also be certified by the Internal Convener on the day of oral defence by cross checking against original documentation.

The Study Coordinator is required to check the proposed examination team satisfies the criteria of Regulation A6: Research Degrees, in particular paragraph 9.2, before submitting for approval. In addition to confirmation of the proposed examination team, the Study Coordinator must also approach an Internal Convener, from a list held by the Graduate School, and set a provisional date for the oral defence. These details will be recorded on the *Examination Arrangements (RDE)* form, which will then be submitted to the Research Degrees Committee, via the Research Degrees Committee, for approval.

The *Examination Arrangements (RDE)* form will be considered by the Research Degrees Committee, operating with delegated authority from Academic Council. In particular, it will consider the previous examining experience of the proposed team. Normally, at least one examiner should have participated in three or more previous examinations of research degree students; in an examination for the award of PhD or doctorate, at least one examiner should have experience of examining at that level. Examiners should also be experienced in research in the general area of the research student's thesis and, where practicable, specialist experience in the particular topic(s) that are the subject of examination.

The title of the thesis given in the *Examination Arrangements (RDE)* form is regarded as the final title and, normally, should not be revised prior to submission of the thesis. If the thesis title is changed prior to submission, the research student and Study Coordinator should inform the Graduate School in writing as soon as possible.

When the examiners' appointments are approved, the Graduate School informs the examiners in writing, advising them of their appointment.

9.3   Before the Examination

9.3.1 Submission of the Thesis

Refer also to Regulation A6: Research Degrees, paragraph 8 and Schedule 6.1.

The submission of the thesis is at the sole discretion of the research student. A research student should not assume that the supervisors' agreement to the submission of the thesis ensures its approval by the examiners. However, if members of the Supervisory Team do not feel the thesis should be submitted, they have a responsibility to make the research student aware of their concerns.

Research students must submit their thesis for examination in "temporary perfect binding", permanent binding or in electronic format where no print equivalent can be supplied. Guidance on

the specification of the thesis is provided in paragraph 8 and Schedule 6.1 of Regulation A6: Research Degrees. Research students are also advised to seek advice from the University Library.

The thesis must be presented in the English language, whether in printed or electronic format, and the research student should provide sufficient copies of the thesis for the examining team along with loose copies of the abstract, a completed *Research Degrees Self-Declaration (RDDecl)* form, accompanied by a summary report issued from the Turnitin Originality Checking system, to the Graduate School.

The abstract will be of approximately 300 words and provide a synopsis of the content, stating the nature and scope of the work undertaken and the contribution made to the knowledge of the subject treated. The layout is as specified in Regulation A6: Research Degrees, paragraph 8.1.5.

If the *Research Degrees Self-Declaration (RDDecl)* form requires a confidentiality embargo to be placed on the thesis, this will also require the approval of the Research Degrees Committee and the thesis will not be issued to the examining team until the confidentiality embargo request has been approved and each examiner has signed a confidentiality agreement. The confidentiality embargo, if approved, is only permitted for a maximum of two years, in the first instance. The Study Coordinator, together with the research student, should ensure that all documents are in order and in particular that the thesis title is correct as per the letter approving the examination arrangements issued by the Graduate School.

9.3.2   Examination Arrangements

The Graduate School will send the thesis, together with the following documentation, to the examiners:

(i)   A guidance note for the examination process;

(ii)   A copy of Regulation A6: Research Degrees;

(iii)   *Examiner Preliminary Report (RDExamA)* form.

In setting the examination date, the Study Coordinator should allow six-eight weeks for the examining team to read the thesis and prepare an *Examiner Preliminary Report (RDExamA)* form before attending the examination.

9.3.3   Examiners' Preliminary Reports

The *Examiner Preliminary Report (RDExamA)* form must be completed independently by each examiner and submitted to the Graduate School at least 7 days prior to the examination. Prior to receipt of reports, any date set for the oral defence will be regarded as provisional. Only once all forms have been submitted to the Graduate School, can the examination take place.

9.3.4   Criteria for Assessing the Thesis

The examining team should familiarise themselves with the guidance note, Regulation A6: Research Degrees and the *Assessment Criteria* before considering the thesis.

9.3.5   Preparations for the Oral Defence

In addition to discipline-specific training provided by each School, research students should familiarise themselves with examination procedures and Regulation A6: Research Degrees as part of their preparations for the oral defence.

9.3.6   Arrangements for the Oral Defence

Once the examination arrangements are confirmed by the School, the Graduate School will send confirmation in writing to the Internal Convener, all examiners and the research student.

The Study Coordinator is responsible for all practical arrangements for the oral defence, including arrangements for hospitality, and the external examiner's accommodation and travel.

In drawing up a schedule for the oral defence, the Study Coordinator should ensure enough time is allowed for a pre-meeting of the examiners, as well as for the oral defence itself. It is recommended the Study Coordinator liaise with the Internal Convener in setting the agenda for the oral defence.

9.4   The Oral Defence

9.4.1   Documentation

A package consisting of the following sets of documentation is sent to the Internal Convener by the Graduate School – which is distributed to each member of the examining team at the oral defence:

(i)   Copies of the completed *Examiner Preliminary Report (RDExamA)* forms;

(ii)   *Research Degrees Self-Declaration (RDDecl)* form;

(iii)   the abstract.

A summary of the *Turnitin Originality Summary Report* is made available on the day and the *Examiner Final Report (RDExamB)* form is provided to the Internal Convener for completion by the examining team after the oral defence.

9.4.2   Role of the Internal Convener

An Internal Convener is appointed from an approved list. The Internal Convener is independent of the examining team and not a subject expert, and their responsibilities are:

(i)   to manage the operation of the oral defence meeting;

(ii)   to ensure compliance with University Regulations, policies and procedures;

(iii)   to ensure the *Examiner Final Report (RDExamB)* form is completed as appropriate;

(iv)   to facilitate discussion where consensus is desirable, but not to arbitrate in any respect;

(v)   to undertake a passport check to assure the University complies with the terms and conditions of its *UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI)* Sponsor Licence.

9.4.3   Role of the Examiners

The conduct of the oral defence will be led by the external examiner, who should take a leading role in questioning the research student. Disagreements between an external examiner and an internal examiner may be resolved through discussion, but the final judgement should be determined by the external examiner.

The internal examiner should be prepared to question the research student thoroughly, but will usually adopt a role secondary to that of the external examiner.

9.4.4   Format of the Oral Defence

Prior to the oral defence, a pre-meeting involving the Internal Convener and the examining team should be held, at which the Internal Convener should distribute copies of the examination documentation listed in **subsection 9.4.1**. In discussion with the Internal Convener, the examiners should use the University's *Assessment Criteria* to agree the format of the oral defence, together with the areas which will be investigated. If any problems emerge, these should be raised and resolved at the pre-meeting.

The research student will be required to defend his or her work by responding to open questions about the research and thesis, and by engaging in discussion with the examiners. Research students should remember that examiners have the right to ask questions on any aspect of the thesis, however, areas which are usually covered by questioning during the examination include:

▪   the ideas and assumptions in the research;

▪   the experimental work;

▪   the results and their interpretations;

▪   which parts of the thesis may not be published if covered by a confidentiality agreement.

Once the examination has been completed the examiners will usually ask the research student to leave the room for a short time to allow them to come to their decision.

9.4.5   Purpose of the Oral Defence

Research students will be able to prepare more effectively for the oral defence if they have a clear understanding of the purpose of the examination. The oral defence provides the following:

▪   the formal method of determining if the research is worthy of the award of MSc by Research/MRes, MPhil, PhD or doctorate;

▪   the process which determines whether a research student will pass or fail their higher degree;

▪   a system by which scholarship and academic excellence is rewarded;

- an opportunity to judge the quality of the research, and the quality of supervision and support provided by the institution;

- ways of applying standards of professionalism in research to ensure graduates meet the necessary level of competence;

- the method by which the University maintains its own standards of quality in higher degree research;

- an opportunity for students to discuss their work, and to obtain feedback about the research from experts in the field, nationally or internationally;

- a way of acknowledging a milestone in professional development for those involved in the research and its supervision.

9.4.6   Conclusion of Examination

At the conclusion of the oral defence, the Internal Convener will ensure the examiners are in agreement and this is recorded on the completed *Examiner Final Report (RDExamB)* form, which is signed by all members of the examining team and the Internal Convener. This should be sent to the Graduate School as soon as possible, together with written guidance on any amendments or corrections which are required.

If the examiners are not in agreement, the matter shall be referred to the Research Degree Committee (refer also to Regulation A6: Research Degrees, paragraph 9.5.5).

9.5   Submission of Final Thesis

Having been informed by the Graduate School of any required amendments or corrections, the research student should ensure that these are included in the final thesis. A member of the examining team, usually an internal examiner, is assigned responsibility for checking the thesis has been satisfactorily amended. He/she must read the appropriate sections of the final thesis and confirm to the Graduate School that the amendments have been made to the examiners' satisfaction.

If the examiners recommend the degree be awarded, or once the thesis has been amended to the satisfaction of the examiners, then electronic and hardbound copies of the thesis should be submitted in accordance with Regulation A6: Research Degrees to the Graduate School accompanied by:

- one loose copy of the thesis title page and abstract;

- as necessary, written confirmation from the examiners confirming the thesis has been amended to the examiners' satisfaction.

Copies of the thesis are then distributed as follows:

- one copy to the research student's Principal Supervisor;

- one copy to the collaborating establishment (if appropriate);

- one electronic copy to the University Library.

Once the hardbound thesis and necessary documentation has been received, the Research Degrees Committee recommends to Academic Council that the degree should be awarded. The

research student's details will be passed to the Academic Administration Department who will contact the research student about arrangements for graduation.

9.6   Examiners Fees and Expenses

Currently, the fees are:

(a)   Examining Fees

MSc/MRes -   £90   (re-examination fee is £50)
MPhil   -   £110   (re-examination fee is £60)
Doctorate -   £150   (re-examination fee is £70)

(b)   Travel Expenses

External examiners are expected to travel by train unless the overall cost of travel by air or car does not exceed the cost of the first class return rail fare. When travel by car has been authorised, the mileage rate will be in accordance with the rates approved by University's Finance and General Purposes Committee.

Hotel accommodation will be arranged by the host School and the cost including approved meals will be paid directly by the University. Reasonable costs for meals on journeys to and from the University will be reimbursed.

A claim form will be made available at the oral defence and receipts/ticket counterfoils should be attached. The completed form should be passed to the host School who shall arrange for the claim to be processed.

10.   RESEARCH DEGREE INTERNAL REVIEW

10.1   Introduction

Following the establishment of the Research Institutes and Graduate Schools by the university in 2009 it was recognised that its Institution-Led Subject Review process for taught provision was no longer the appropriate vehicle for reviewing research degree provision, not least because the Research Institutes operated across many subject disciplines respectively, and had assumed responsibility for research students through their respective Graduate Schools. Furthermore, the Research Institutes differed in their strategic objectives, and their respective staffing and student profiles. Consequently, the *Research Degree Internal Review (RDIR)* was introduced. It was intended that this process would facilitate knowledge-sharing, be informative to the Graduate Schools' and Research Institutes' forward-planning, and ensure consistency in the research student experience.

Three separate Review events were held: *Institute for Health and Wellbeing Research* on 24 August 2012; *Institute for Management, Governance and Society (IMaGeS) Research* on 17 September 2012; and *Institute for Innovation, DEsign And Sustainability (IDEAS) Research* on 30 January 2013. The Review Panels, approved by the Research Degrees Committee, included

two external representatives and one internal research student representative on each. The events were all convened by Professor Peter Robertson, then Vice-Principal (Research and Academic Support Services). The Reviews' outcomes were considered by the Research Degrees Committee at its meetings in October 2012 and February 2013.

Planning for the next cycle of RDIR has been delayed pending the outcomes of the *Research Strategy Review* in 2015, the appointment of a new Vice-Principal for Research, and the substantial organisational re-structuring undertaken in 2016, which saw the dissolution of the Faculties, and their respective Research Institutes and Graduate Schools.

The single Graduate School was launched at the start of 2016-17. This, together with further development of the university's *Institution-Led Subject Review (ILSR)* process (see **Section 3** of this Handbook), has culminated in a revised RDIR procedure, albeit closely following the ILSR process.

10.2 Purpose

The process considers both standards and quality, and combines assurance and enhancement, with a view of enhancement as being concerned with:

- making, or doing it better;
- making the best of opportunities and resources;
- any aspect of teaching, learning, assessment or the student learning experience;
- change, doing the same things better, or doing new, better things.

Enhancement should be guided by the following questions:

- where are we now?
- where do we want to be in the future?
- how are we going to get there?
- how will we know when we get there?

The Review is intended to be a structured process to ask and answer these questions. The answers should emerge, and be developed progressively through the process, including dialogue with the Review Panel, and following the Review Report. The Panel will engage in a consultancy type dialogue with the Graduate School about the Graduate School's self-evaluation and its ambitions and priorities for the future.

The process is based on evaluation and reflection considering:

- analysis of the key outcomes from past internal quality assurance processes (in particular, *Research Degree Appraisals*);
- a range of internal and external reference points on strategy, standards and quality;
- future contexts, ambitions and priorities.

Outcomes from the Review will inform Graduate School-level planning. Outcomes will be also reported to the Research Degrees Committee, Academic Council and the Board of Governors. In addition, the Board of Governors is required to endorse an annual statement relating to *Institutional-Led Review of Quality* for submission to the Scottish Funding Council.

Figure 1: Diagram showing Research Degrees Internal Review (RDIR) Process
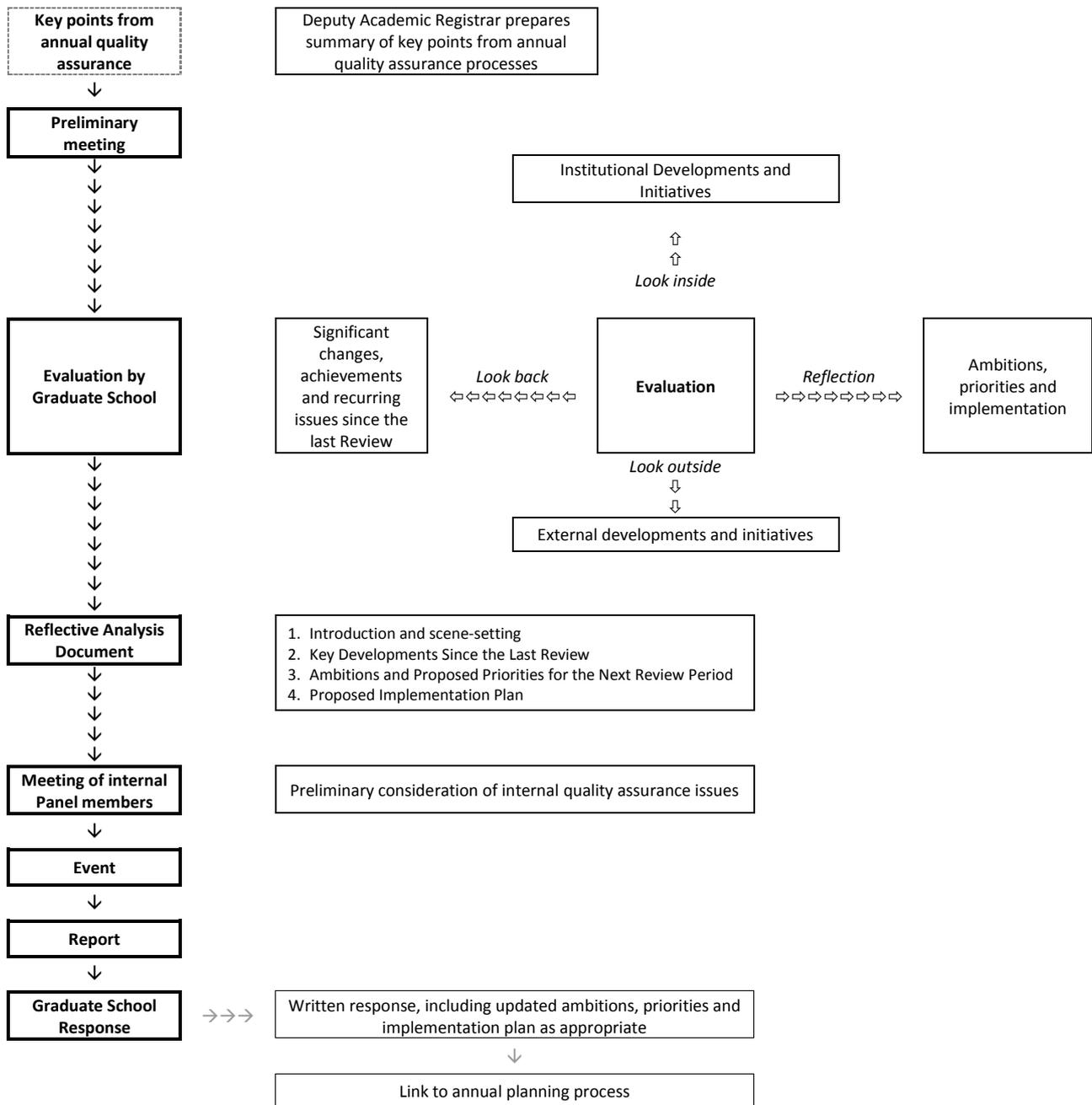
10.3 Responsibilities

The Head of the Graduate School is responsible for leading preparation for the Review, and coordinating appropriate input from the Research Degree Coordinators.

The Assistant Chief Academic Officer is responsible for approving the issuing of the Review documentation to the Panel.

The Department for Governance and Academic Quality, through the Deputy Academic Registrar, will provide support on aspects of the Review process and in helping the Graduate School in terms of documentation requirements.

10.4 Preliminary Meeting

The process formally starts with the preliminary meeting (organised by the Department for Governance and Academic Quality), normally at least six months prior to the proposed Review event. This meeting includes the Deputy Principal and Chief Academic Officer, Vice-Principal for Research, the Assistant Chief Academic Officer, the Head of the Graduate School, Research Degrees Quality Officer and the Deputy Academic Registrar.

This preliminary meeting informs preparation at the Graduate School level; the Deputy Academic Registrar is responsible for providing a summary of issues from past quality assurance processes, which will act as an *aide-mémoire* for discussion (*Summary Report*). This *Summary Report* will accompany the *Reflective Analysis* (see subsection 10.8) when it is issued to the Review Panel.

The objectives of the preliminary meeting are to discuss:

▪ the purpose, scope, process and timescales of the Review;

▪ how the Review should be organised, with particular reference to the role of the Graduate School and relevant input from the academic Schools/Research Degree Coordinators;

▪ reference points particularly relevant to the Graduate School;

▪ any international dimensions which are significant for the Review;

▪ likely substantial or significant issues for the Graduate School, reflecting recurrent or unresolved issues (in particular from annual quality assurance processes; and

▪ the importance of research student involvement in the process, including review of the *Reflective Analysis.*

A *Planning Sheet* serves as an agreed framework of timescales and this is drafted by the Deputy Academic Registrar in liaison with the Head of the Graduate School.

10.5 Review Panel Composition

The Review Panel comprises a combination of external and internal members, intended to provide different expertise and perspectives. The Panel's collective role is to consider the Graduate School's self-evaluation as set out in the *Reflective Analysis*, and to engage in a consultancy type dialogue with the Graduate School about the evaluation, and the Graduate School's proposals for the future. In making informal approaches to Panel members, the Graduate School should emphasise the importance of the consultancy role with respect to the selection of external Panel members.

Typically the Review Panel has the following minimum composition:

Convener:	The Assistant Chief Academic Officer will normally convene the event. The Convener's role is to manage the event, ensure it is conducted in accordance with the University's requirements, and to act as the formal contact between the Panel and the Graduate School.
One internal member:	An internal member of staff will be appointed, drawn from the University's database of approved Internal Conveners.

One student member: An enrolled student of the University will be appointed who will normally have experience of representing students' interests at School or institutional level.

Two, or more, external members: The external Panel members are nominated by the Head of the Graduate School. These individuals should be selected so there is an appropriate balance of subject expertise in order that the Panel, as a whole, can contribute effectively to the key agenda items. Wherever possible, candidates should be of senior and/or national/international standing. Any previous associations which members of staff have had with the proposed Panel members should be declared on the relevant paperwork.

The Panel membership is approved by the Convener of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee on the recommendation of the Head of the Graduate School and Deputy Academic Registrar.

10.6   Observers

The University may invite such internal or external observers to these events as it deems appropriate.

10.7   Evaluation by the Graduate School

The evaluation stage is not simply about creating a document. It is intended to be the critical and most valuable part of the process. It should be a collective process, managed by the Graduate School, collaborating as appropriate with the academic Schools and Research Degree Coordinators. Engaging with stakeholders in the early evaluation phase is crucial.

A model for evaluation based on a set of 'looks' in specific directions is proposed - see the *Overview Diagram – Development of Reflective Analysis* (refer Figure 2).

The workload can be split into tasks and should include discussion and dialogue; e.g. evaluating views of staff could take the form of structured workshops. Outcomes should be summarised in working notes or documents that can be cited as references in the *Reflective Analysis*, and which may be made available for the Review Event.

The process should be used as an opportunity to stimulate enhancement thinking and action.

Research students' views are a critical input to the *Look inside* part of the evaluation that informs the *Reflective Analysis*. Inputs should include routine evaluation questionnaires. The expectation would be for students to have the opportunity to review the text in these sections, in particular, prior to finalisation.

Figure 2: Overview Diagram – Development of Reflective Analysis

Look back
(Over the period since the last Review)

- Significant changes at University and School/Graduate School level and the impact of these in the context of the research student experience, quality and standards.

- Outcomes achieved in response to recommendations arising from the previous Research Degrees Internal Review(s).

- Changes to:
  - the course portfolio, including rationale and impact; and
  - research student numbers and profile.

- Key issues arising from the Research Degree Appraisals, including strengths, actions and success/achievement, and outstanding/recurring issues.

Look inside
(Institutional Developments and Initiatives)

- Implications of, and opportunities arising from, the university's strategic ambitions, objectives and priorities, including research and the research student experience, interdisciplinarity, internationalisation, commercialisation, enhanced employability.

- Implications for information provided to students informed by research student feedback and institutional developments.

⇧
⇦ **Evaluation*** **Reflection*** ⇨
⇩

Look outside
(External Developments and Initiatives)

- External developments and initiatives in respect of, for example:
  - enhancement of the research student experience;
  - research student information;
  - graduate employability;
  - Quality Enhancement Themes;
  - Vitae, and the *Researcher Development Framework*;
  - Advance HE (formerly the Higher Education Academy).

Ambitions, Priorities and Implementation

- Ambitions and proposed priorities for the period until the next review.

- Implementation Plan for each of the ambitions and priorities identified, including:
  - an indication of timescale;
  - key responsibilities for the action where relevant;
  - dependencies on other areas of university provision, including resource implications; and
  - anticipated outcomes and proposed measures of success.

- Potential risks and mitigating actions.

*   This will involve appropriate engagement with stakeholders, including research students, alumni and employers, as appropriate.

10.8 Reflective Analysis

The key document of the Review is the *Reflective Analysis*, which summarises the outcomes of the self-evaluation of the research student experience, quality and standards. It can be supported by additional material, either included with the *Reflective Analysis,* or made available for reference at the time of the Review event.

The *Reflective Analysis* should normally follow the structure below:

1. *Introduction and Scene-Setting*

   This should include the following:

   - a brief overview of the University including its organisational structure and strategic ambitions (standard text will be provided as a basis for this);

   - confirmation that the research student experience, quality and standards are the focus of the Review;

   - description of the Graduate School and its relationship with the academic Schools that host research students;

   - an organogram for the Graduate School and its linkage with academic Schools, detailing key roles and decision-making responsibilities for research degrees;

   - a factual profile of the research student community across the academic Schools summarising:

     - current research student numbers, along with an associated profile of the student population, including:

       - full-time, part-time and research students studying at a distance;
       - home/EU students;
       - international students;
       - gender balance;
       - research students who are staff members;

     - completion periods, awards conferred and other key performance indicators considered appropriate;

     - staff resources;

     - specialist resources (where relevant).

   - the approach taken to preparing the *Reflective Analysis* including engagement with key stakeholders and data sources.

2. *Key Developments since the last Review*

   This section should include:

   - an overview of any significant changes which have occurred at university, Graduate School and academic Schools since the last review and the impact of these in the context of the research student experience, quality and standards;

- a summary of the outcomes achieved in response to recommendations arising from the last review(s);

- drawing on the Deputy Academic Registrar's report as appropriate:

  - detail any significant changes to the research student numbers and profile since the last review;

  - provide a summary of the key issues arising, over the period since the last review, from annual *Research Degree Appraisals* including:

    - evidence of specific strengths;

    - actions taken to enhance aspects of the research student experience or academic standards and evidence of success/achievement;

    - outstanding/recurring issues still requiring action.

3. *Ambitions and Proposed Priorities for the Next Review Period*

This section should open with a critical assessment of the current research student experience, of quality and of standards, reflecting on the content provided in section 2. A SWOT analysis may usefully be included to support the critical assessment.

The section should, thereafter, include reflection and discussion of:

- implications and opportunities for research degree provision arising from the university's strategic ambitions and objectives (e.g. interdisciplinarity, internationalisation, commercialisation, enhanced employability) in respect of, for example and as appropriate, research student numbers and profile, input and output standards, and enhancement of the research student experience;

- sector-wide developments and enhancements in respect of the research student experience;

- other factors which could impact (positively or negatively) on research degree provision.

This section should conclude by drawing on the above to detail ambitions and propose corresponding priorities for the period of the next review.

4. *Proposed Implementation Plan*

A proposed implementation plan should be provided for each of the priorities identified in the preceding section. The plan should include:

- an indication of timescale;

- key responsibilities for the action where relevant;

- dependencies on other areas of university provision;

- anticipated outcomes and proposed measures of success.

In addition, risks associated with the successful implementation of the plan should also be identified and mitigating actions proposed.

10.9   Meeting of Internal Panel Members

10.9.1 Review of Evidence

A meeting of the internal members of the Review Panel is scheduled prior to the Review event, typically two weeks in advance.

The main objective of this meeting is to consider the completeness and effectiveness of the Graduate School's analysis and reflection on messages from internal quality assurance processes, in particular the *Research Degree Appraisal* Process, including statistical indicators, research student evaluations, and any other relevant inputs. The *Summary Report* is key in this respect. The key questions that will guide these internal discussions are as undernoted:

- Are there any significant issues for the Graduate School arising from review of quality assurance, since the last Review?

- Have these been adequately addressed in the *Reflective Analysis*?

- Is the Graduate School's appraisal of its current situation comprehensive?

- Are development priorities obvious from the above?

- Are the proposed developments appropriate and achievable?

- Are there any omissions?

The outcome will be a *Briefing Note* for the Review Panel produced by the Deputy Academic Registrar. This may include an action note to the Graduate School requesting additional information on any outstanding issues.

The aim of this process is to assist the main Review event to focus on substantial or significant issues relating to future enhancement, by providing an initial check on how effectively issues from the past have been considered by the Graduate School.

10.9.2 *Review Programme*

The second objective of the meeting of internal Panel members is to develop a draft programme for the Review event (based on an initial draft prepared by the Deputy Academic Registrar), which will include identifying associated groups of staff and students for each meeting.

The Head of the Graduate School will be asked to attend the last part of this meeting in order to help firm up the programme. The Review programme is designed to reflect the *Reflective Analysis* themes. External Panel members will be invited to make comments about the draft programme prior to attending the event.

10.10 Review Event

The Review event normally spans one day. The initial draft programme, developed at the meeting of internal Panel members, is finalised at the initial meeting of the Panel. This will be informed through Panel members' scrutiny and evaluation of the *Reflective Analysis* and also through internal Panel members' preliminary views/discussions. The six questions, which guide discussions of the internal Panel members are also pertinent, and provide a useful starting point, for the Review event.

Each Review programme is effectively a series of meetings:

- private, involving the Panel only;

- Panel and staff;

- Panel and students; and

- Panel and employers (where appropriate).

Each Review programme is bespoke, reflecting the *Reflective Analysis*' themes and tailored specifically for the Review event. At the start of the event, there will normally be a number of obligatory sessions, including meetings with the Head of the Graduate School and senior staff. Thereafter, meetings are arranged with Research Degree Coordinators, supervisors and other staff as appropriate, research students and other stakeholders, broadly in line with themes outlined in the *Reflective Analysis*. A tour of facilities is not obligatory, but can be built into the programme where this is pertinent to the event.

If the Panel is satisfied with the comprehensiveness of the Graduate School's contextual awareness (as conveyed in the *Reflective Analysis*), it is anticipated the bulk of engagement between the Panel and School will focus on exploring the Graduate School's future direction and plan, including priority actions to achieve the plan, with the Panel endorsing the Graduate School's proposals or providing further advice.

10.11 Review Report

A formal report of the Review event is prepared by officers from the Department for Governance and Academic Quality. The report is focused on high level outcomes; the Panel's views of the Graduate School's future agenda and key areas of development. The report does not provide an account of all discussions and so the full details underlying the outcomes would not necessarily be incorporated into the report. The information would be available, should the Graduate School have any queries/require the context to help inform the Graduate School's response to the outcomes. After the report has been approved by all members of the Panel, the *Confirmed Review Report* is made available on the University's website.

10.12 School Response

The Graduate School is required to produce a succinct report in response to the Review report. The Graduate School Response should include the Graduate School's view of the Panel's commentary contained within the Review report and how this will inform future plans. An updated statement of future directions and plans should be provided. The Graduate School Response must be approved by the Deputy Principal and Chief Academic Officer, prior to being issued to the Review Panel.

The Graduate School Response must be produced no later than three months after the Review event.

10.13 Evaluation of Process

As part of its commitment to continuous enhancement of its quality assurance procedures, the University will annually review the efficiency and effectiveness of the Review process. To assist in this process, Panel members and the Head of the Graduate School are asked to complete a *Panel Member Questionnaire* or *Head of School Questionnaire*, as appropriate.

11.   APPEALS AND COMPLAINTS

> Indicator 18: Higher Education providers put in place and promote independent and formal procedures for dealing with complaints and appeals that are fair, clear to all concerned, robust, and applied consistently. The acceptable grounds for complaints and appeals are clearly defined.
>
> UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2012), Chapter B11: Research Degrees

Refer also to Regulation A6: Research Degrees, paragraph 10.

11.1   Appeals – Postgraduate Certificate (PgCert) Research Methods

Any enrolled research student wishing to appeal a decision of the Assessment Board for the *Postgraduate Certificate (PgCert) Research Methods* course, should refer to:

Regulation A3: Student Conduct and Appeals, Section 1: Academic Appeals (Awards and Progression) Procedure

and

Regulation A4: Assessment and Recommendations of Assessment Boards, paragraph 7.

11.2   Appeals – Research Degrees

Any enrolled research student wishing to make an appeal in respect of the following should refer to Regulation A6: Research Degrees, paragraph 10:

(i)   an examination decision of the Research Degrees Committee, made on the recommendation of the examiners either for the first examination or a re-examination; or

(ii)   a decision of the Research Degrees Committee to terminate the research student's registration and/or enrolment

(iii)   a decision of the Research Degrees Committee to refuse a transfer of registration to a doctoral degree following a second unsuccessful attempt.

11.3   Complaints

Any enrolled research student wishing to complain should refer to the Complaints Handling Procedure.

12.   THE AWARD OF PHD BY PUBLIC OUTPUT

Refer also to Regulation A6: Research Degrees, paragraph 11.

12.1   Introduction

Any full-time or part-time member of staff of the University or affiliated research institution shall be eligible to apply to register for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Public Output, and will be subject to the provisions of Regulation A6: Research Degrees, in particular paragraph 11.

12.2   Registration and Approval of the Portfolio of Public Output

A public output candidate shall submit an application to register to the Research Degrees Committee, through the Research Degrees Committee, using the *Research Degree Public Output Registration (RDRPO)* form.

The application should include;

- a list of intended public outputs on which the candidature is to be based;

- a list of the intended refereed journals/publications/publishers as appropriate on which the candidature is to be based;

- list any existing output produced more than 5 years before the intended date of submission, without these constituting a majority of the total public outputs being submitted;

- a preliminary statement giving details of where and when the research on which the works were based was undertaken;

- the intended word count of the thesis;

- an outline discussion (of 3,000 words) of the contribution of the public output to the advancement of the field of study.

12.3   Consideration of the Application

The application will be submitted to the Research Degrees Committee meeting for consideration.

12.4   Supervision

The Research Degrees Committee shall approve and appoint two research-active supervisors, for each public output candidate, one of whom shall be a member of staff of the University. One supervisor shall be appointed Principal Supervisor with formal responsibility for the public output candidate's supervision. The Supervisory Team shall normally have combined experience of supervising not less than three doctoral research students to successful completion. At least one member of the Supervisory Team shall have supervised two or more doctoral research students to successful completion. The Supervisory Team, in particular the Study Coordinator, shall be required to identify any training needs of the public output candidate through the *Annual*

Monitoring Progress Report (RSR), and to advise and assist in the preparation of the final submission.

12.5   The Thesis, the Portfolio of Public Output and Support Statement

Research students and Supervisory Teams are directed to Regulation A6: Research Degrees, paragraph 11.5 which covers the content of the thesis, the portfolio and supporting statement.

12.6   Examiners and Examination

A candidate for the award of PhD by public output shall be examined by three examiners: an internal examiner who shall be a member of University staff not associated with the Supervisory Team; and two external examiners. Further information related to the Examination Process in contained in **subsection 9** of this Handbook, and Regulation A6: Research Degrees, paragraphs 11.5 and 11.6.