GUIDELINES ON HIGHER RISK POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH PROGRAMMES

Introduction

The increase in the number of PhD students, and enrolment on other equivalent research degrees i.e. EngD, DBA, is a key element of the University's strategy and is a core part of its business. For most of the University there is an established infrastructure with high quality research groups, laboratories and equipment/resources which provide a suitable environment for research students. In those cases the recruitment, supervision and monitoring of students is well established and much of the responsibility can be delegated to Schools and Institutes with an oversight by the Postgraduate Studies Committee (PSC) through the approval of supervisors, ownership of the guidelines 'Postgraduate Research Student Code of Practice' and the award of research degrees. Implicit in this arrangement is an understanding that recruitment of students, and the definition of areas of research, can be safely delegated to Schools/Institutes.

However, there are other cases where there is/are

- a less well established research culture
- less well developed or embryonic research groups
- limited laboratory space and equipment or other research infrastructure
- inexperienced research and support/technical staff

In those cases there a greater risk that the quality of the student experience will be less than required by the University. There may also be restrictions in the research areas that can be adequately supported. In those cases there is a need for a more structured approach to recruitment, approval and monitoring of students so that the University can be assured that all students who are accepted for a research degree will receive high quality support, can complete their degrees in a timely manner and uphold the research standards of the University.

Postgraduate research programmes, where the greater level of scrutiny is required, is a matter for the Dean and PSC, and ultimately Senate, but would include:

- at a campus with no substantive record of successful PhD supervision
- research students who are in new discipline areas where there are few staff with research experience or where there are few staff with a PhD (this could include some emerging areas within the School of Textiles and Design)
- in some cases students who study off-campus, particularly when based overseas, but supervised or partially supervised from the UK
- at a location where the research community is small or where the infrastructure is not conducive to high quality research
- at a location where academic staff are unfamiliar with the standards of a UK PhD
- other special circumstances as deemed appropriate by the Dean or PSC

This document describes the processes that should be adopted at the approval stage when a decision is made whether or not to accept a student and also the monitoring processes to ensure that the student is receiving high quality supervision and is making satisfactory progress.

Risks and issues for consideration

In order to be successful a student studying for a PhD requires:

- Supervisors who between them have knowledge of, or expertise in, the subject and the ability to judge the standard of students work benchmarked against the standards the highest quality within UK Universities. It is also a prerequisite that the staff be recognised by the Schools/Institutes as having an appropriate research record.
- A management structure that provides:
  - an approved progression process within the School/Institute
  - an explicit route for the research student to raise concerns about or provide feedback on the quality of supervision

- Access to a research library or appropriate journals and periodicals
- Access to specialist laboratories, equipment and facilities that are sufficient to allow original research in the defined areas of study
- Access to a community of scholars

In addition, it is required that a student will participate in various induction activities, have opportunities to present research findings at seminars and conferences and will undertake courses of study to develop a range of skills outside the area of research to ensure that, on graduation, they have the skills to contribute to the wider academic community or a professional career.

Proposal
In order to manage the recruitment, supervision and oversight of research students it is proposed that the following process be adopted. This will apply to all students deemed by the Dean to fall into the categories of students described above. As far as possible the additional levels of scrutiny and monitoring will simply be extensions of existing processes.

Approval
Normally, a School can decide whether or not to accept a student and the Dean, ratified by the PSC, will approve the primary and second supervisors. For students in high risk areas acceptance of a student will require more detailed consideration and students should only be accepted when there is agreement about all the provisions identified above.

Therefore before a high risk student is accepted the Director of Research in the School/Institute, that will be responsible for the student, should seek approval from the Dean to recruit the student for a specific area of study. The area of study must have the appropriate approval from the relevant Government agency in the country. The case submitted should demonstrate how the various requirements of student support listed above will be provided. In the case of students in Dubai and Malaysia then the proposed local supervisors should be responsible for preparing the case for consideration by the School.

Monitoring and annual progression
Before each student is accepted the School should identify how a student will be monitored and how the assessment at the end of each year that leads to progression will be made. It is expected that the annual review will be that of the normal School process. The School/Institute will then be able to monitor the effectiveness of the supervisory arrangements.

Dubai and Malaysia
The formal University QA processes embedded in the Schools/Institutes includes activities on overseas campuses. Research activities are included as part of such reviews. Schools/Institutes may wish to take advantage of the independent reviews/audits as part of their arrangements for monitoring the progress of high risk research students.