

CODE OF PRACTICE FOR THE DELIVERY AND MANAGEMENT OF POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH DEGREE PROGRAMMES VALIDATED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF ESSEX

Introduction

1. This Code of Practice outlines the University of Suffolk's requirements for the delivery and management of postgraduate research degrees that lead to awards of the University of Essex.
2. Separate requirements exist for research degree programmes at the University of Suffolk that lead to awards of the University of Brighton and University of East Anglia.
3. This Code of Practice should be read in conjunction with the University of Suffolk Framework and Regulations for Research Degree Awards.

Management of research degree provision

4. The Suffolk Doctoral College is an umbrella term for all of the staff within the University's academic schools, research institutes and relevant professional services departments who are involved in supporting the postgraduate research student experience (see structure chart in Appendix A). As a virtual entity, the Suffolk Doctoral College provides a hub for the development, support and oversight of postgraduate research degree provision, under the strategic oversight of the Pro Vice-Chancellor Research and Knowledge Exchange.
5. From a governance perspective, the Postgraduate Research Committee is responsible for ensuring the effective delivery and management of postgraduate research degree provision within the University, in partnership with the awarding bodies. The Committee plays an important role in maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of the research student experience, reporting to the Research and Enterprise Committee and onwards to Senate.
6. Within each academic school, Executive Deans are responsible for the recruitment of research degree students and for assuring and enhancing the quality of the school's research degree provision. The Associate Dean or approved nominee will be responsible to the Executive Dean for the school's arrangements for the recruitment of research degree students, management of the student lifecycle and associated academic support, liaising with and reporting as necessary to the Executive Dean, Academic Registrar and Pro Vice-Chancellor Research and Knowledge Exchange. They will be supported in their role by a Postgraduate Research (PGR) Course Leader who will lead on operational matters within the School. Supervisory teams comprising staff from the academic schools or research institutes are responsible for guiding and supporting students' research, ensuring that they develop the necessary skills and knowledge to complete a thesis.

7. Postgraduate research student administration will be undertaken within Registry Services, with the Academic Administration and Student Journey teams working in collaboration with PGR Course Leaders within academic schools and the Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate.

8. The Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate will be responsible for running the Research Development Programme and supporting the personal and professional skills development of students, as well as developing appropriate training for supervisors and staff involved in Annual Progress Reviews and thesis examination. The Directorate will work with academic schools and research institutes to ensure that students are provided with a high quality research environment.

9. The roles and responsibilities of students, supervisory teams, academic schools, Registry Services and the Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate are summarised in Appendix B.

Recruitment, admission and induction

10. The University of Suffolk operates monthly intake points for new postgraduate research students, providing regular updates to the University of Essex on new students.

11. The University's Admissions team are responsible for overseeing the admissions process for postgraduate research degree students. Applications for research degree programmes are submitted online and are initially reviewed by the PGR Course Leader within the appropriate academic school. If the application is deemed to be worthy of further consideration, a potential supervisory team will be identified (see paragraph 17 below) and the PGR Course Leader will invite the applicant for interview. The interview will provide applicants with an opportunity to meet their potential supervisory team to discuss the research proposal further, assess their ability and potential to succeed, and assess whether there are sufficient resources and facilities available to support the project appropriately within the University of Suffolk. Following the interview, the applicant may be required to make changes to their research proposal if deemed necessary by the supervisory team. Following a successful interview and confirmation that any outstanding requirements of admissions have been met, an offer of study will be made by the University of Suffolk.

12. All PhD students are initially registered as MPhil/PhD and must be confirmed as an MPhil or PhD student by the end of the first year for a full-time student (or equivalent for part-time students).

13. All new students are allocated to a named academic school and research institute within the University of Suffolk.

14. The Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate are responsible for ensure that all new research students are provided with an induction programme. The induction programme will be organised by the Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate and will provide opportunities for students to meet with representatives from a range of academic and professional services teams and from the Students' Union. During the induction, students shall be provided with:

- general information about the University of Suffolk, the Suffolk Doctoral College, and the partnership with the University of Essex as the research degree awarding body
- general information about the school / research institute, research specialisms and the research culture and environment
- the names and contact details for their supervisory team, and information about supervisory arrangements
- an overview of the Code of Practice for the Delivery and Management of Postgraduate Research Degree Programmes and the Framework and Regulations for Research Degree Awards, including progress, confirmation and completion procedures and requirements
- a summary of the roles and responsibilities of the student, their supervisory team, their academic school / research institute and relevant professional services teams within the Suffolk Doctoral College
- an introduction to the Head of Research Culture and Knowledge Exchange to provide information about training needs assessment and opportunities for knowledge and skills development, including the requirement for active engagement with the Research Development Programme and any school / institute level research development opportunities or interdisciplinary activities
- policies on funding attendance at conferences
- an opportunity to discuss the challenges that will typically face research students during their studies, and where guidance may be sought in the event of difficulties
- information about student support services (including Library and Learning Services, Student Services, the Student Success team, and the Careers and Employability team)

- information about the University's approach to academic integrity
- information about the University's approach to research ethics and governance and any subject-specific requirements (including the codes of relevant professional bodies and discipline groups)
- a tour of facilities and online resources, including information on relevant health and safety requirements
- details of opportunities for students to provide feedback on their experiences at the University of Suffolk and to be represented on relevant University committees
- any current research or teaching employment opportunities
- opportunities to meet with new and existing research degree students, both formally and informally through social events planned across the year by the Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate and academic schools.

Training needs assessment and Research Development Programme

15. The Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate provide a programme of workshops and events as part of the Research and Knowledge Exchange Development Programme, mapped onto the Vitae Researcher Development Framework, to help students to complete their research degree and prepare for their future careers. This includes online and face-to-face opportunities for developing research skills and facilitating ongoing personal and professional development, as well as a library of previously filmed workshops.

16. The amount of research development and skills training required will vary according to the student's specific needs. All students are expected to complete an initial training needs analysis at the outset of their studies, and to engage in critical self-reflection through their Personal Development Plan and through contact with their supervisory team throughout their studies. Levels of engagement with development opportunities (including any mandatory training requirements) will be monitored and discussed as part of the Annual Progress Review process, informed by attendance data for relevant sessions offered through the Research and Knowledge Exchange Development programme.

Supervisory arrangements

17. Academic schools are responsible for ensuring that appropriate supervisory arrangements are in place for all research students. A student's supervisory team will comprise a lead supervisor, a co-supervisor and, in some cases, an additional co-supervisor, normally from the University of Suffolk. In some instances, there may be an approved external supervisor with topic expertise

linked to funded PhD research. At least one member of the supervisory team must have experience of successfully supervising at least one research degree student through to completion. Supervisors should not be a partner or a close relative of the student or have a personal relationship with the student that might give rise to a conflict of interest.

18. All new members of staff who, with the agreement of their Executive Dean of School, may become research student supervisors shall meet with relevant staff from the Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate to discuss the University of Suffolk Framework and Regulations for Research Degree Awards and the Code of Practice for the Delivery and Management of Postgraduate Research Degree Programmes. Less experienced members of staff who have not supervised a research degree student through to completion must attend the relevant University of Suffolk training for research student supervisors and have access to opportunities for sharing good practice in supervision, including through mentoring provision. The Head of Research Culture and Knowledge Exchange is responsible for ensuring that all new and existing staff complete the required mandatory training (at least every three years).

19. Supervisors should be research active and remain well-informed and up to date on all relevant postgraduate research regulations, policies and procedures. Experienced supervisors must complete refresher training in accordance with University of Suffolk requirements (at least every three years).

20. Academic schools and research institutes should ensure that adequate academic staff time is allocated for the supervision of each research student as part of the school or institute's workload allocation model. There can be some flexibility in these arrangements, for example, time allocations might vary according to the stage the student has reached and whether they are studying away from the University of Suffolk.

21. Registry Services is responsible for maintaining an up-to-date central record of all research students and their supervisors, which should be accessible to relevant staff within academic schools and research institutes and the Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate. This list of supervisors should be made available to the Postgraduate Research Education Team at the University of Essex on request.

22. Academic schools and research institutes are responsible for ensuring that adequate arrangements are made for supervision when any supervisor either leaves the University of Suffolk or is on an extended period of leave (for example a form of parental leave) and is not carrying on with supervision during this period. Any temporary or permanent changes in supervision must be

approved by the school's Associate Dean and reported to the student administration team within Registry Services and the Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate at the earliest opportunity.

23. Supervisory meetings should take place on a monthly basis for full-time students. Established practice for part-time students is supervisory meetings every six weeks, although in some cases bi-monthly meetings (every eight weeks) may be more suitable for part-time students' individual circumstances. A record of each supervisory meeting should be drafted by the student for confirmation by the supervisory team via the online reporting system. For students with immigration sponsorship, the majority of contact should be face-to-face. Supervision should normally be provided until the student has submitted a final version of their thesis for the award of their degree, including any referral period or to complete corrections.

24. Supervisors should provide guidelines for students regarding the volume and standard of work to be expected at the end of each year of their studies and for confirmation, in accordance with the milestones outlined in Appendix A of the Framework and Regulations for Research Degree Awards. It should be made clear that progress from one year to the next, confirmation of PhD status and progress into the completion period will depend on satisfactory achievement of the necessary work and attainment of the milestones.

25. Where students have concerns about supervisory arrangements, they should discuss these with their lead and/or co-supervisor in the first instance. However, students have the right to discuss supervisory problems with a member of staff who is not involved in their supervision, such as the PGR Course Leader or Associate Dean within their school or staff within the Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate. Discussions about problems with supervision should remain confidential if the student requests this. Students may request a change of supervisor. The Associate Dean should consider these requests and accommodate them where practicable, noting that it may not always be possible for suitable alternative arrangements to be made.

Annual Progress Review (APR)

26. Academic schools and research institutes are responsible for ensuring that an Annual Progress Review (APR) meeting is held, involving the student, an independent panel member (not on the student's supervisory team) and one other academic who acts as Chair (normally the Associate Dean or nominee within their school). The Chair should not be a partner or a close relative of any member of the supervisory team or have a professional or personal relationship with the student that might give rise to a conflict of interest. Supervisors may observe but do not normally contribute to the discussions.

27. The APR meeting should normally be held face-to-face at the end of each year of study, and should be organised by the PGR Course Leader within the school. If a student or supervisor is away from the University in the period when the panel is due, or if the student is a distance learning student, the panel should be held virtually.

28. The student should complete the student section of the APR report form, outlining their current research plan, progress made and a future work schedule, and submit this (with the required documents) to their supervisors to complete the supervisor report. The completed report should be returned to the Chair at least two weeks in advance of the meeting date.

29. The purpose of the APR meeting is to provide the student with a wider range of advice on their research and to provide an opportunity to reflect on the student's progress, including assessment of training needs and assessment of progress against the milestones for the relevant stage of study as outlined in Appendix A of the Framework and Regulations for Research Degree Awards. The aim of the APR process is to assess whether an individual has the clear potential to achieve their intended award within the prescribed period of registration. In order to progress, students must be able to demonstrate the following:

- a) a suitable research plan
- b) a report that demonstrates appropriate progression according to the plan
- c) a body of writing or other evidence appropriate to the stage of progression being reviewed
- d) critical investigation and evaluation of an approved topic which has the potential to result in an independent and original contribution to knowledge
- e) an understanding of research methods appropriate to the field
- f) an ability to relate the findings of the study to the broader context.

30. At the end of the meeting, the Chair should complete a report of the panel, including an indication of the state of the research and the amount of work that has been carried out, as well as a recommendation as to whether the student should be allowed to progress to the following year (including confirmation of PhD status at the end of the first year for full-time students or the end of the second year for part-time students, in accordance with the requirements outlined in the Framework and Regulations for Research Degree Awards). Progression may be subject to minor amendments to be signed off by the supervisor(s). If there is concern about the student's progress, this must be indicated clearly in the Chair's report, with a summary of what needs to be achieved for progression.

31. A copy of the Chair's report should be uploaded to a shared repository created by Registry Services, along with the APR report form completed by the student and supervisory team, for consideration at the next Progress Review Committee meeting.

32. Where more work is required before progression can be agreed, the student will be given one further opportunity for progress to be reviewed, no later than two months from the first APR meeting. Only two applications to progress are permitted each year, and so if the application is rejected for a second time, the student shall only be permitted to submit for a lesser award, where such an award is available and is considered to be appropriate. Where no such award is available or appropriate, the University of Suffolk will consider withdrawing the student from study on the grounds of lack of sufficient academic progress, in consultation with the University of Essex Dean of Partnerships.

33. In the event a student does not engage with the APR process, the panel will make a recommendation to the Progress Review Committee in their absence, based on the information available to them.

University of Suffolk Progress Review Committee

34. The Progress Review Committee meets monthly to review student progress at all key points in the student lifecycle.

35. The Chair of the Progress Review Committee should not be a partner or a close relative of members of the supervisory teams of students under consideration, or have a professional or personal relationship with any of the students under consideration that might give rise to a conflict of interest.

36. The Progress Review Committee should review the progress of every research student through to the award of a degree, withdrawal or failure, on the basis of reports from APR panels. Where no APR panel has taken place, for instance because a student is carrying out research abroad with limited access to the internet, the supervisor and the student must each submit a progress report.

37. Where progress is considered satisfactory, the Progress Review Committee has delegated authority from the University of Essex to make decisions in relation to progression and confirmation of PhD status. Decisions on entry into completion, discontinuation, downgrading to MPhil or extensions to the standard period must be referred to the University of Essex Dean of Partnerships for final approval.

38. The Progress Review Committee can recommend discontinuation or downgrading at any point in the academic year and at any point prior to the submission of the thesis, and special meetings can be convened at any time.

39. Where the Progress Review Committee is considering a recommendation from an APR panel for discontinuation or downgrading, the Progress Review Committee membership must include at least two members who were not on the student's last APR panel. The student must be offered an opportunity to discuss the proposed decision with the Progress Review Committee before the final recommendation is forwarded to the University of Essex Dean of Partnerships, and if appropriate to present evidence about any extenuating circumstances. The student should be invited to meet with the Progress Review Committee, or the Chair of the Progress Review Committee, in advance of the formal recommendation being made to the University of Essex.

40. The Progress Review Committee can recommend an extension to a student's standard period of up to six months, if it is deemed the student has not met the milestone requirements to enter a completion period. The request should include a detailed explanation of the expected work to be undertaken within the extended period. In such instances, the subsequent completion period available to the student will be reduced by six months, unless exceptional circumstances result in the reduction not being appropriate. Students must be offered an opportunity to discuss this with the Progress Review Committee before the final recommendation is forwarded to the University of Essex Dean of Partnerships for approval. In exceptional circumstances an extension of more than six months may be granted, and will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

41. The Progress Review Committee will report its decisions and recommendations on each student to the University of Essex Dean of Partnerships as follows:

- a) a list of the decisions on students who have been allowed to proceed with their studies either unconditionally or subject to further review at a specified date if appropriate
- b) a list of the decisions on those MPhil/PhD students whose status should be confirmed as PhD
- c) individual reports on students where the recommendation to the University of Essex Dean of Partnerships is to move into completion; change of status from MPhil/PhD or PhD to MPhil; extension to the standard period; or discontinuation.

42. The University of Essex Dean of Partnerships may request further information on any student and discuss their progress with the lead supervisor or other relevant members of University of Suffolk staff as necessary. The University of Essex Dean of Partnerships may require

the Progress Review Committee to reconsider the situation of any student, and its progress decisions, where this is deemed necessary.

43. If downgrading or discontinuation is confirmed by the University of Essex Dean of Partnerships, the student may then request a review of the recommendation in accordance with the University of Suffolk Academic Appeals Procedure for Research Degree Students. The Progress Review Committee should in all cases inform the student in writing of the decision and of the opportunity to appeal.

Submission deadlines and the completion period

44. Academic schools and research institutes should ensure that students understand the University of Suffolk regulations on thesis submission deadlines. Students should aim to submit their thesis at the end of their standard period (three years full-time or six years part-time). Students permitted to enter a completion period (the 'writing up' stage) at the end of their standard period do so on the understanding that their full thesis will be ready for submission by the end of that completion period. As outlined in the Framework and Regulations for Research Degree Awards, the standard period of study may be reduced in exceptional circumstances if the student is ready to submit their thesis, up to a maximum of one year for a full-time student (pro-rata for part-time students), with the approval of the University of Essex Dean of Partnerships on the recommendation of the University of Suffolk Progress Review Committee.

45. The Intention to Submit form should be submitted to the student administration team within Registry Services at least three months prior to submission. The form should be completed by the student in conjunction with the lead supervisor and should confirm the proposed title of the thesis, the thesis abstract, the proposed internal and external examiners (with their CVs) and the proposed Independent Chair for the viva. The form is subject to approval by the Pro Vice Chancellor Research and Knowledge Exchange or nominee and the University of Essex Dean of Partnerships

46. If a student has not submitted their thesis within the standard period, an APR panel shall be held at the end of a student's standard period to consider whether they should recommend to the Progress Review Committee that the student be permitted to move into completion.

Appointment of Independent Chair of the viva

47. The University of Suffolk will appoint an Independent Chair to oversee the examination process and the conduct of the viva. To be nominated as an Independent Chair, the member of staff must:

- a) be a permanent member of staff of the University of Suffolk
- b) be from outside the student's academic school and/or research institute
- c) have been an examiner for at least one postgraduate research examination, either internally or externally
- d) have a good understanding of the University of Suffolk's procedures and regulations for the University of Essex award being examined, and
- e) have undertaken relevant training for the role.

48. The Independent Chair's duties are:

- a) to oversee the arrangements for the assessment process including liaising with the examiners to set a date for the viva
- b) to ensure that the academic school or research institute notifies the student of the date for the viva
- c) to oversee the proceedings at the viva in accordance with University of Suffolk regulations and procedures, drawing on the guidance on the conduct of vivas in Appendix C.

Appointment of examiners

49. As outlined in the Framework and Regulations for Research Degree Awards, research degree students shall be examined by at least two persons approved by the University of Essex Dean of Partnerships on the recommendation of the University of Suffolk Progress Review Committee. For non-staff candidates, the examiners shall include a member of University of Suffolk academic staff as the internal examiner and an external examiner. Where the student is currently employed or has been employed by the University of Suffolk within the academic school or research institute within which they are registered within the twelve months prior to thesis submission and where they worked for more than six hours per week, the examination process shall be conducted by two external examiners.

50. The proposed examination team should combine the right blend of technical expertise and examining experience. Reflecting the University of Suffolk's commitment to equality and diversity, when recommending and appointing examiners and an Independent Chair of the viva, every effort shall be made to achieve a reasonable gender balance.

51. The internal examiner for a research degree should be:

- a) a member of the academic or research staff of the University of Suffolk (visiting staff cannot be appointed as an internal examiner)

- b) research active with appropriate expertise
- c) normally have a degree, or equivalent, at the level at which they are being appointed to examine (if not a case as to their suitability needs to be made, noting that a Professor with appropriate publications would be considered to be 'equivalent' and a case would not need to be made).

52. The internal examiner should not:

- a) have been part of the student's supervisory team other than acting as a temporary supervisor for a period of up to six months but not in the final six months before the student is examined
- b) have been a member of the APR panel during the final six months before submission of the thesis
- c) have a professional or personal relationship with the student, any member of the supervisory team or the external examiner that might give rise to a conflict of interest
- d) be the partner or a close relative of any member of the supervisory team.

53. The external examiner(s) for a research degree should be:

- a) research active with appropriate expertise
- b) normally employed in higher education or a research institute (if not, including Emeritus Professors, a case as to their suitability needs to be made)
- c) a senior member of staff with relevant examination experience (if not, a senior and experienced internal examiner must be appointed to work alongside the less experienced external examiner)
- d) qualified to the level at which they are being appointed to examine (if not, a case as to their suitability needs to be made).

54. The external examiner should not:

- a) have been a former member of the academic staff or a student of the University of Essex, the University of Suffolk or their partner institutions within the past five years
- b) be a prospective member of staff in the process of applying for a position at the University of Essex, the University of Suffolk or their partner institutions, or recently been appointed to a staff position (this applies at any point during the examination process)
- c) have been involved in the supervision of the student
- d) have a professional or personal relationship with the student, any member of the student's supervisory team or the internal examiner that might give rise to a conflict of interest.

55. The internal and external examiner's duties are as follows:

- a) to read the thesis or, in the case of thesis involving original creative output, assess the work presented
- b) to reach an independent judgment on the thesis, against the appropriate criteria for the award, without consulting the other examiner about the assessment, and to record this on an Initial Report Form prior to the viva
- c) to send their completed Initial Report Form to the student administration team within Registry Services at least one week prior to the viva
- d) to attend the viva and viva pre-meeting
- e) to examine the thesis together with the other examiner
- f) to come to an agreement with the other examiner as to the outcome of the examination
- g) with the other examiner, to complete the Joint Report Form which records the outcome of the examination, and compile the list of corrections if required
- h) in the case of a referral, normally to re-examine the referred thesis.

56. In the case of a pass with corrections, the internal examiner (or a nominated external examiner in the case of staff candidates) will be responsible for assessing the corrected thesis within a reasonable time period and reporting on the outcome to the student administration team within Registry Services. For minor corrections, the examiner should report on the outcomes of their assessment within two weeks of receiving the corrected thesis, and for major corrections within one month.

57. In cases where a re-examination is necessary and the internal examiner has left the University of Suffolk after the original examination, they shall normally continue to act as the internal examiner for the re-examination. When one or more of the appointed examiners is no longer able to examine the thesis (for reasons such as leaving the university, relocation or death), the academic school or research institute will nominate an appropriate examiner to take over the examination process for approval by the Pro Vice Chancellor Research and Knowledge Exchange or nominee and the University of Essex Dean of Partnerships, and the examination will continue to schedule.

Arrangements for submission of thesis and conduct of the viva

58. Students must submit their thesis electronically to the student administration team within Registry Services, who will check the format and notify the relevant academic school / research

institute that the thesis has been submitted so that arrangements can be made for the viva. The University of Essex will also be notified of the submission of the thesis in order to update the student record.

59. The viva should normally be held no later than two months after the submission of the thesis. A viva may be conducted either in person, via video conference or via a hybrid approach in accordance with the Guidance on the Conduct of the Viva in Appendix C.

60. Six weeks before the viva date, a shared folder will be created by Registry Services containing the thesis and pre-viva examination report templates. Access will be given to the examiners, with their completed Initial Report Form (1A) to be sent to the student administration team within Registry Services for uploading to the shared folder one week prior to the viva.

61. Both examiners should be present at the viva, whether in-person or virtually, and are expected to follow the guidance on the conduct of the viva in Appendix C and any additional guidelines sent to them on appointment. The Chair and the examiners should hold a pre-viva meeting earlier the same day to discuss their preliminary views on the thesis, to plan the viva, and to be briefed by the Independent Chair on the available outcomes of the examination process as outlined in the Framework and Regulations for Research Degree Awards.

62. The student should be given the opportunity to defend the thesis. It will usually be necessary for the student to temporarily leave the room/video call while the examiners confer as to the outcome of the examination and the student should then be told the result.

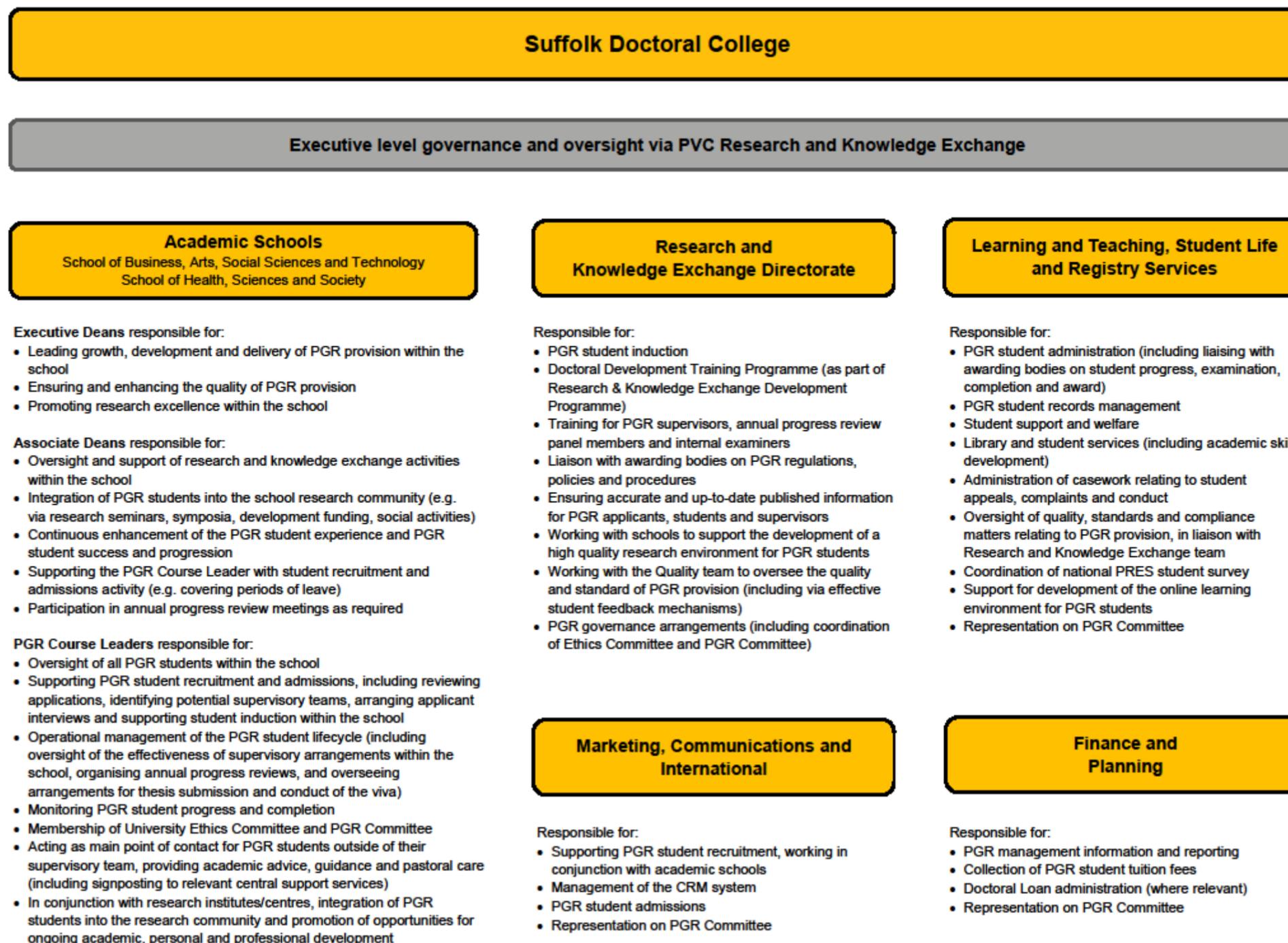
63. Supervisor(s) are not normally permitted to be present at the viva. The student's supervisor can only be present at the request of the student in exceptional circumstances, to be approved on an individual basis by the Associate Dean and with the agreement of the external examiner. It is good practice to invite the supervisor to attend at the end of the viva when the examiners communicate their recommendation to the student. The attendance of the supervisor in these circumstances is with the permission of the examiners and the student.

64. Following the viva, the Independent Chair must inform the PGR Course Leader and the student administration team within Registry Services of the outcome, in accordance with the available outcomes listed in the Framework and Regulations for Research Degree Awards. The examiners must complete a post-viva report which records the outcome of the examination within two weeks of the viva. If the student is required to complete corrections, the examiners must provide a list of corrections alongside the post-viva report. The examiners' report and Chair's

report must be sent to the student administration team within Registry Services for submission to the Progress Review Committee and final approval by the University of Essex Dean of Partnerships. Once reviewed by the Committee and approved by the Dean of Partnerships, any corrections are sent to the student by the student administration team within Registry Services.

65. Where relevant, the student will be required to submit the amended thesis to the student administration team within Registry Services, for onward submission to the nominated examiner for review and acceptance of the corrections. If approved, the Progress Review Committee will verify that the corrections have been made to the satisfaction of the nominated examiner and a recommendation will be made to the University of Essex Dean of Partnerships for the award to be made. The University of Essex award outcome letter will be sent to the student via the student administration team within Registry Services.

66. Students are entitled to receive copies of the examiners' pre- and post-viva reports on their thesis on request, when examining is complete.



Roles and responsibilities in relation to research degree provision

Student responsibilities

Postgraduate research students are expected to:

- exercise critical and independent thought, both in the design and execution of their research project
- exercise self-discipline in adhering to the programme of work as mutually agreed with their supervisory team, and to present work at the agreed times or frequency
- prepare written records of all supervisory meetings for the agreement of supervisors, using the online supervision record form available in the Suffolk Doctoral College area on Brightspace
- devote on average at least 36 hours per week to their research (full-time students) or at least 12 hours per week (part-time students)
- take principal responsibility for conducting the research project leading to the degree and ensure that it is completed within the regulated period of time
- read and understand the University of Suffolk Framework and Regulations for Research Degree Awards and the Code of Practice for the Delivery and Management of Postgraduate Research Degree Programmes
- identify and seek advice on appropriate research methods and techniques before embarking on substantial research
- devise and agree with their supervisory team a timetable of submission dates for sections of work including the final thesis
- recognise that academic misconduct (including plagiarism, collusion and fabrication of data or evidence) is unacceptable in all circumstances
- make supervisors and the student administration team within Registry Services aware of any specific needs or circumstances likely to affect their studies
- inform their supervisors and the student administration team within Registry Services of any changes in circumstance which are likely to have a bearing on the programme of research
- be prepared to undertake self-appraisal and take responsibility for their own personal and professional development, taking advantage of the opportunities that are offered
- prepare for supervisory meetings, evaluating progress and planning future activities for discussion

- identify conferences and workshops to attend which will enhance the quality of their research or provide appropriate training
- ask for the opportunity to give presentations if this is not offered
- understand that the quality of work is their own responsibility
- be realistic about the time needed to complete the thesis
- familiarise themselves with the guidelines on thesis submission and with the examination process (as outlined the Guidance on the Conduct of the Research Degree Viva in Appendix C below) and ensure that they are prepared for their viva.

Supervisors' responsibilities

The supervisory team must:

- maintain regular contact with the student with at least monthly meetings (pro-rata for part-time students) until the thesis has been submitted and, if this arises, during any referral period and corrections.
- when supervising a student with immigration sponsorship, ensure that the majority of contact is face-to-face
- ensure that students complete and submit the online supervision record form after each meeting, for review and sign off by the supervisory team
- provide students with guidance about the nature and standard of research work expected, including advice on attaining that standard, together with advice on academic practice in the discipline, matters of research design, ethical issues, and appropriate health and safety issues
- make it clear to each research student that it is possible for the research and writing up to be completed within the standard period and provide guidance on the appropriate volume of research work for the degree in question
- assist each research student in developing a clear timetable of work and emphasise the importance of keeping to it
- request written work and oral presentations as appropriate and comment on such work within a reasonable time
- ensure students read the Research Misconduct Policy and conduct formative exercises to run student's work through plagiarism detection software in their first year of study
- ensure students have access to the facilities and equipment (or online equivalent) necessary to enable them to complete their research successfully, escalating any access issues to other

colleagues within the school / research institute or the Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate as necessary

- be reasonably accessible to students and advise them of any lengthy absences which will change the routine of monthly meetings
- keep each student well informed in advance about any prospective periods of leave and the planned supervisory arrangements during the leave
- support the student in identifying and recording training needs at the beginning of their studies via their professional development plan, and review them on a regular basis and at least via every APR
- keep up to date with courses and workshops available through the Research Development Programme, the Early Career Researcher (ECR) Network and other relevant professional development programmes, and encourage the student to book onto relevant training
- ensure that the student has opportunities to develop appropriate generic and research skills and that a record of course/workshop completion and attendance is kept
- advise students of the importance of making contact with other researchers in the field and of presenting their work to academic audiences (including advising them on the opportunities to present work to staff and fellow postgraduate students and about attendance and participation in appropriate seminars and conferences)
- keep a record of dates of formal supervisions with the student and of written work submitted, including the feedback and when it was provided, which can be produced later if necessary
- ensure that Annual Progress Review (APR) meetings are arranged for each student in accordance with University of Suffolk requirements
- report on each student's progress to the APR panel, indicating what has been achieved and advising the panel where they believe that the student is unlikely to reach the standard for the degree for which they are registered or where progress is slow, and ensure that the Chair of the panel forwards a report on the panel to the student administration team within Registry Services in time for the next Progress Review Committee meeting
- warn and advise students in writing, with a copy to the PGR Course Leader and the student administration team within Registry Services, where work is not of the appropriate standard or is being produced too slowly, and of steps that might be taken to remedy the situation
- encourage students to think about their subsequent employment and possible future career trajectories, and direct the student to suitable sources of training, advice and support

- ensure that students understand the requirements of the degree and any requirements relating to the agreed thesis format, provide guidance on the examination process, help students to prepare for the viva, and direct the student to appropriate training
- nominate examiners for a student's thesis.

Academic school responsibilities

Academic schools will:

- work with the Marketing, Communications and International Directorate to promote doctoral study and funding opportunities, and provide support to prospective doctoral students
- arrange admissions interviews and work with the Admissions team to make offers to successful applicants
- coordinate the induction process for new students
- work with Registry Services to manage and oversee the postgraduate research student lifecycle (including arrangements for supervisory meetings, annual progress reviews, thesis submission and vivas)
- provide advice and guidance to students on their research programme
- work with the Head of Research Culture and Knowledge Exchange to provide operational guidance, support and training for supervisors
- work with the Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate to provide students with opportunities to provide feedback on their experiences as a research degree student on a regular basis, including through the PRES survey and other suitable mechanisms (e.g. focus groups; feedback on training provision)
- work with the Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate to ensure that student feedback is reviewed and acted upon in order to enhance the student experience, with outcomes and associated action plans reported to the Postgraduate Research Degree Committee
- signpost relevant student support services, including Library and Learning Services, Student Services, and the Careers and Employability team
- provide opportunities for students to connect with other research students, for example through social events
- support the development of a thriving research community that PGR students feel an integral part of, in collaboration with academic schools and research institutes

Registry Services responsibilities

Registry Services will:

- support the administration of research degree programmes, including maintenance of accurate student records and the administration of the student lifecycle from admission to award, in liaison with PGR Course Leaders and the Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate
- coordinate the enrolment of students, working in conjunction with the Admissions team
- coordinate the work of the Progress Review Committee and liaise with awarding bodies on matters requiring their input and/or approval

Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate responsibilities

The Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate will:

- lead the development and ongoing review of local regulations, policies and procedures for the management of research degree provision within the University of Suffolk, in collaboration with the awarding bodies, and production of associated guidance for staff and students
- oversee the quality and standard of research degree provision, in conjunction with the Quality Assurance team within Registry Services
- provide guidance to academic schools and research institutes on the organisation and conduct of supervisory meetings, annual progress reviews and the examination process
- provide opportunities for students to develop their knowledge and skills through the Researcher Development Programme and other development opportunities
- provide training for supervisors and ensure that supervisors attend training at least every three years
- provide opportunities for students to connect with other research students, for example through social events

Guidance on the Conduct of the Research Degree Viva

Introduction

1. This guidance has been produced to provide a framework of expectations and guidance to research degree students, examiners and academic schools / research institutes on how the examination process operates, and to help ensure that the viva is conducted in a manner that is fair and consistent.
2. The University of Suffolk is committed to providing an inclusive learning environment for all students. If a student identifies any additional support needs associated with the examination process, and particularly the viva, they should discuss this with their supervisor and make contact with the student administration team within Registry Services so that additional support, and potential reasonable adjustments, can be discussed and implemented to assist the examination process.

Purpose of the viva

3. The viva is a long-established part of the examination process for a research degree. The main focus of the assessment is on the written thesis. However, the viva, which is the oral part of the assessment, is used to inform the examiners' final assessment decision.
4. The viva gives the examiners the opportunity to explore any issues in detail. Examiners may have a strong sense of the outcome from reading the thesis, but the viva gives the student an opportunity to defend their work, as well as to validate the thesis and demonstrate to the examiners that they have completed the work themselves.

Viva format

5. The viva may take place either in-person, via video conference or via a hybrid approach. Of central importance is ensuring that appropriate arrangements are in place for the individual student's thesis assessment, and the preferred format should be discussed by the student and the supervisory team prior to thesis submission. The student may express a preference which the academic school or research institute should seek to accommodate wherever possible.
6. It is recognised that video conferencing provides the ability to expand the network of external examiners internationally, by reducing potential barriers such as financial constraints, time commitments and environmental impact of travel.

7. Whether the viva is held in-person or via video conference, it is important to ensure that the student understands how the examination will be conducted and is in full agreement. It is also essential to provide the best possible environment for both the student and the examiners, and to ensure that a suitable venue has been booked and/or that the video link used is of a high quality.

Viva arrangements

8. Students must submit an Intention to Submit form three months prior to the submission of their thesis, in order to start the process of appointing examiners and an Independent Chair. The academic school or research institute is responsible for nominating two examiners in accordance with the criteria outlined in the Code of Practice for the Delivery and Management of Postgraduate Research Degree Programmes.

9. The Independent Chair is expected to undertake any arrangements necessary for organising the viva, with support from the school administrative team.

10. The student and examiners will then be contacted to confirm the arrangements for the examination of the thesis. The availability of all parties should be considered when setting a viva date and time.

11. The viva should normally be held no later than two months after the submission of the thesis for examination. The school or research institute should ensure that the date of the viva is communicated to the student administration team within Registry Services as soon as it is confirmed.

12. Students who fail to engage in viva arrangements, to the extent where it has not been possible to arrange a viva, shall be deemed to have withdrawn permanently from the University of Suffolk (and from their research degree), unless it has been agreed that the viva can be waived.

Waiving the viva

13. To request that a viva is waived, the examiners must submit details of the grounds on which they wish to excuse the student from the oral examination, which is subject to approval by the University of Essex Dean of Partnerships. The student may normally only be excused from the oral examination where the viva has been arranged for a re-examination following a referral period and where the examiners are in agreement that the student is now in a position to pass the viva, or where there are exceptional circumstances which prevent a student from engaging in the viva process.

14. Vivas will not be waived where one or more examiners has deemed from reading the thesis that the student seems likely to fail, to only be eligible for a lower award or to be referred.

Venue for in-person vivas

15. In cases where the viva is taking place in-person, the venue for the viva should normally be on campus, reasonably quiet and allow the viva to proceed without interruption. Approval from the Associate Dean is required for a viva to be exceptionally held at a venue outside the University of Suffolk.

Technical preparation and support for video conference vivas

16. The University of Suffolk recommends the use of Microsoft Teams as its preferred and supported video-conferencing software. The academic school will be responsible for arranging the Teams meeting, and wherever possible, a room set up for video-conferencing should be used.

17. Technical assistance will be provided by the Digital and IT team as required. Time should be allowed before the start of the viva to ensure the software and equipment is working correctly, and that all parties are satisfied with the arrangement.

18. A suitable environment should be found by all parties, and the academic school must ensure that all parties have appropriate IT equipment and a confidential space to facilitate the remote viva. All parties should have their video camera on at all times, and the use of a non-distracting virtual background is permitted.

19. In the event that technical issues are experienced during the viva (e.g. one or more participants are unable to connect to Teams, experience audio or visual issues, or internet or software failure), all parties should seek to resolve the issues for up to 30 minutes. If a resolution has not been found after 30 minutes, the Independent Chair should end the examination and email the student administration team within Registry Services (copying in all examination parties) to notify them that the viva was unable to take place and that an alternative date will be found.

Attendance at the viva

20. The viva will normally only involve the external examiner, the internal examiner (or second external examiner), the student and the Independent Chair.

21. Members of the student's supervisory team will not normally be present at the viva. They can only be present in exceptional circumstances, to be approved on an individual basis by the Associate Dean and with the agreement of the examiner(s). It is good practice for the lead supervisor to be invited to attend at the end of the viva when the examiners communicate their

recommendation to the student. The attendance of the supervisor in these circumstances is with the permission of the examiners and the student.

Duration

22. The length of a viva will vary but if it is longer than two hours, the Independent Chair will recommend an adjournment for a break.

Preparation by the student

23. Students should consult their supervisory team on how to prepare for the viva, and should also be offered a mock viva.

24. The student should re-read their thesis and anticipate possible areas of questioning. They should be able to access a copy of the thesis at the viva.

Discussion between examiners

25. Copies of the thesis and examination paperwork are made available to the examiners six weeks before the viva date, via a shared folder created by the student administration team within Registry Services.

26. The examiners must not contact nor engage in discussion with the student ahead of the viva. The examiners will submit independent reports on the thesis to the student administration team within Registry Services, who will upload to the shared folder in advance of the viva.

27. On the day of the viva and before seeing the student, the Independent Chair and the examiners will have a pre-viva meeting, at which they will discuss their initial assessment and agreed approach to the viva, including the areas of questioning.

28. It is the responsibility of the Independent Chair to oversee the proceedings at the viva and to ensure that the University of Suffolk's Framework and Regulations for Research Degree Awards are adhered to.

Conduct of the viva

29. At the start of the viva, the Independent Chair shall:

- a) introduce themselves and the examiners
- b) confirm the purpose of the viva
- c) explain anything the examiners have agreed about how they will proceed to conduct the viva
- d) for a viva conducted via video conference, confirm the etiquette for the viva, such as hand raising and what to do in the event of any technical issues.

30. The examiners should endeavour to establish an atmosphere in which the student will be able to perform to the best of their ability.

31. Normally, the examiners will start with some general / introductory questions that are designed to put the student at their ease. The phrasing and tone of questions should be such that the student is able to provide helpful clarification, and appropriate evidence and elaboration. Questioning should not be hostile or designed to 'catch the student out'.

32. Once the viva has finished, the student will leave the room / virtual room and the examiners will reach a decision on the recommended result. The examiners should recommend one of the outcomes listed in the University of Suffolk Framework and Regulations for Research Degree Awards. The outcome must be decided on academic grounds only; it is not the examiners' responsibility to take into account personal circumstances of the student, which could affect their ability to meet the timescale set by the examiners.

33. The student will be invited back into the room / virtual room to be told the recommended result and the reasons for the decision. If corrections are required, the student should be told that they will be provided with an agreed written list of corrections to be made, which will be sent to them by the student administration team within Registry Services once approved by the Progress Review Committee and the University of Essex Dean of Partnerships.

34. If the examiners are unable to agree the outcome, then they should advise the student that this is the case and that further communication shall come from the student administration team within Registry Services.

Post-viva paperwork

35. The examiners will complete the Joint Report Form (1B), which records the outcome of the examination, including the formal recommendation, and a list of corrections, if required. The Chair will also compile a summary report. The examiners' report and Chair's report must be sent to the student administration team within Registry Services for virtual circulation to the Progress Review Committee and for sharing with the University of Essex.

36. Once the formal recommendation has been approved by the Progress Review Committee and the University of Essex Dean of Partnerships, the student will be contacted by the student administration team within Registry Services to inform them of the result of the examination.

37. In the event of an outcome of fail, referral or option to resubmit for a lower award, the student will be given the opportunity to appeal this decision in accordance with the University's Academic Appeals Procedure for Research Degree Students.