**School action plan: improving research degree completion rates**

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| **Summary**  Following recent discussions across the University, and the recent approval of the [Research degrees’ Good Practice Guide](http://www.city.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/295658/Research-Degrees-Good-Practice.pdf), the City Graduate School developed an action plan (and a template on which actions could be recorded) for Schools to consider and take steps to help improve research degree completion rates locally. The guiding principle in developing the action plan was the recognition that responsibility for the academic progress of the University’s research students was located with the Boards of Studies of the School within which the student was registered.  The following action plan (and template) was approved by University ExCo at its meeting on 26 January 2016 and is divided into the following subsections:   * Student Recruitment, Selection and Admission * Progress monitoring and registration * Supervision and supervisor development * Research environment   School Boards of Studies, or delegated sub-committees, are asked to:   1. consider each recommendation 2. recommend appropriate actions 3. identify appropriate oversight 4. acknowledge corresponding actions currently being taken forward through the annual research degree programme evaluation exercise and/or Periodic Review   School Boards of Studies, or delegated sub-committees, are required to review the action plan once annually for reporting to and consideration by the Graduate School Committee and to help share good practice between Schools across the University as well as help identify particular areas for future development. |

**2015/16 School action plan: improving research degree completion rates**

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| **Student Recruitment, Selection and Admission** | **Recommendation** | **Responsibility/**  **Committee** | **Action** | **Update on action** | **Link to action in APE/Periodic Review** | **Deadline/**  **frequency** |
| 1. Promote research expertise of potential supervisors and doctoral student projects/research areas on School webpages |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Develop PGR student profiles/case studies on School webpages |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Review and if needed enhance selection and admissions processes, including the use of interviews, pre-registration support and open days |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Ensure applicants are aware of financial commitment of study and clarity expectations of the programme at the outset, including key milestones indicated in RaP |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Provide School/Department inductions for new research students to supplement the University-wide induction |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Review unsuccessful applications to see what lessons can be learned to enhance the process |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Progress monitoring and registration** | **Recommendation** | **Responsibility/**  **Committee** | **Action** | **Update on action** | **Link to action in APE/Periodic Review** | **Deadline/**  **frequency** |
| 1. Review student academic progress regularly through the completion of key milestones in RaP, including supervision meetings and the annual progress review, and other mechanisms |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Monitor upgrade process of each student and transfer to MPhil if transfer unsuccessful within the maximum period permitted |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Review approval process for periods of suspension and requests for extension |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Develop efficient and effective processes for approval of research student research ethics applications |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Monitor and develop research degree programmes through the Annual Programme Evaluation exercise |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Review research degree management information and undertake regular research degree data analysis |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Supervision and supervisor development** | **Recommendation** | **Responsibility/**  **Committee** | **Action** | **Update on action** | **Link to action in APE/Periodic Review** | **Deadline/**  **frequency** |
| 1. Review supervision loads and take PGR supervision into account in School/   Departmental workload allocation models |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Monitor staff usage of RaP and address issues arising |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Review and develop practice to ensure appropriate supervision is available during periods of absence or staff departure |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Explore mechanisms to encourage staff peer-to-peer support and mentoring of less experience research supervisors |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Review supervision practice, including the role of the second supervisor, and categorisation of research supervisors |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Promote the engagement of research supervisors in appropriate professional development activities, such as completion of Research Supervision module on MA in Academic Practice and attendance at relevant fora in the sector (e.g. those organised through Vitae, SHRE, and UKCGE) |  |  |  |  |  |

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| **Research environment** | **Recommendation** | **Responsibility/**  **Committee** | **Action** | **Update on action** | **Link to action in APE/Periodic Review** | **Deadline/**  **frequency** |
| 1. Promote networking opportunities within/across School/Departments |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Review provision of teaching opportunities and assess distribution of teaching responsibilities across cohorts |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Consider mechanisms to increase publication of research student work, such as hosting School PGR symposium and/or 3 minute thesis competition (3MT®) as heats to University events |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Map existing School/Department research skills and methods training against the domains of the [Vitae Framework for Researcher development](https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-development/about-the-vitae-researcher-development-framework/developing-the-vitae-researcher-development-framework) |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Direct students to Careers Service and other student support services |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Develop mechanisms to help students be known in the community and to meet with future employers |  |  |  |  |  |

**Summary of intended measures of success/impact of proposed actions to improve research degree completion rates**

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| **Objective** | **Measure of success/impact** |
| **Student recruitment, selection and admission** | * Appropriate ‘fit’ or ‘match’ with research expertise/strategy within the School/Department/Centre * Effective and efficient admissions’ procedures and decisions implemented * Applicants develop a clear research proposal and proposed timeline prior to registering * Staff and students clear of roles and responsibilities at the outset * Reasons for unsuccessful applications identified and appropriate measures taken * Better student selection at the outset leading to enhanced completion rates |
| **Progress monitoring and registration** | * Problems of academic progress are identified and appropriate action is taken early * Improved student progression with a positive effect on completion rates * Assurance that staff and students are meeting regularly * Delays in research studies (because of ethics applications for example) minimised * Trend analysis undertaken and research degree data quality improved |
| **Supervision and supervisor development** | * Research supervisors are supported in their roles and their contribution is recognised * Good supervision practice within Departments is shared across the School * Students are assured of the continuity of their supervision * Research supervisors are provided with networking opportunities with colleagues outside the University * Better student progression through better supervision and thus a positive effect on completion rates |
| **Research environment** | * City Graduate School Researcher Development Framework embedded in research degree programmes in accordance with the sector aim to ‘professionalise’ the researcher * The “culture of completion”[[1]](#footnote-1) is cultivated * Students are made aware of the breadth of career opportunities, including KTPs, available to them |

1. See Ketteridge, S. and Shiach, M. (2009). *Supervising research students* in Fry, H., Ketteridge, S. and Marshall, S. (eds). *A Handbook for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: enhancing academic practice,* 3rd edition. Routledge, London. pp. 166-185. See also http://www.cgsnet.org/ckfinder/userfiles/files/uga\_fdg.pdf and http://www.cgsnet.org/ckfinder/userfiles/files/uga\_psa.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-1)