



# **RESEARCH DEGREE QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURES**

**(Governing programmes of study pursued by the normal route and by published work or practice, leading to the research degrees of Master of Philosophy and Doctor of Philosophy; and Professional Doctorate programmes)**

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# **CONTENTS**

## **Preface**

- 1. Outline of the University's Research Degree Quality Assurance Procedures and Progress Monitoring System**
  - 1.1 The Board of Studies for Research Degrees**
  - 1.2 Key organisational and individual responsibilities**
  - 1.3 The major stages of a research degree programme**
  - 1.4 Admission as a postgraduate student by research**
  - 1.5 Enrolment as a postgraduate student by research**
  - 1.6 Project planning, postgraduate induction and the research student-supervisor agreement**
  - 1.7 Registration of the proposed programme of study for a research degree**
  - 1.8 The annual research progress report and action plan**
  - 1.9 Progress monitoring timetable**
  - 1.10 Approval of transfer of registration from MPhil to PhD or Mid-Programme assessment for PhD direct candidates**
  - 1.11 Thesis presentation**
  - 1.12 Examination**
  - 1.13 Procedures relating to research student problems and grievances**
  
- Annex 1 Research Student Application, Admission and Enrolment Process**
  
- Annex 2 Procedures for considering Research Degree Proposals, MPhil to PhD Transfers and Mid-Programme Assessments**
  
- Annex 3 List of Candidates'/Supervisors' Proformas**
  
- Annex 4 List of Examiners' Proformas**
  
- Annex 5 List of Documents and Guidance Notes**

## **Preface**

The University continues to welcome research students and hopes that they enjoy their research work and bring it to a successful conclusion. All research students, supervisors and others with an interest will also find useful information in the Code of Practice for Research Students and Supervisors and the Research Degree Regulations, including, where applicable, Regulations and Procedures Governing the Award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Published Work and Doctor of Philosophy by Practice and the Professional Doctorates Framework: Principles and Regulations. Note that with the introduction of these alternative routes to obtaining a PhD, the procedural arrangements described here do not apply equally to all candidates. Where differences are in force this is mentioned in the text

The rest of this guide describes the procedural arrangements which the University operates so that supervisors and students work together to ensure a high quality and successful experience for every research student. Please read the guide carefully as we hope that it will help students and supervisors to plan and monitor research progress and enable the Board of Studies for Research Degrees to make sure that all students benefit from a structured approach to their research work regardless of the academic area they are working in.

## 1. **Outline of the University's Research Degree Quality Assurance Procedures and Progress Monitoring System**

- 1.1 The Board of Studies for Research Degrees of Senate (made up of staff engaged in research, members of Senate and external representatives, covering all academic areas of the University) is responsible, under its terms of reference for:

"the implementation of the University's regulations, policies and procedures for the admission, registration, supervision and examination of students who wish to follow programmes of study at the University leading to degrees by research".

The Board of Studies for Research Degrees is also required to:

"implement and monitor the University's Research Degree Quality Assurance Procedures, by considering annual research progress records from supervisors and students and taking any necessary actions to safeguard the standard of awards and the quality of the research student experience".

These responsibilities mean that the Board of Studies for Research Degrees must monitor closely the experience of research students, check that the conditions in which they work, their supervisory arrangements and the progress of their academic work are satisfactory and that they are provided with appropriate research training. While the essence of the quality of a research student's experience is the personal relationship with their supervisor, this should take place within a clear framework which makes sure that students, regardless of their area of study, have an experience of comparable quality. It is from this premise that the University's Research Degree Quality Assurance Procedures begin.

- 1.2 Key individual and organisational responsibilities are:

- (i) The Research Student: whose role is to plan the research carefully, work to agreed deadlines and maintain consistent contact with their supervisors.
- (ii) The Supervisors (especially the main supervisor or Director of Studies): whose role is to recommend admission of students, to guide and advise the student on the direction of the research, comment and criticise constructively and assist the student to acquire a thorough grounding in research methodology and relevant research techniques.

- (iii) The Research Team Leader or other Research Manager (in an academic School or Centre, representing the Director of School or Centre): whose role is to authorise admission of students on behalf of the School or Centre, to support and advise both students and supervisors and to ensure that conditions are appropriate for the conduct of the research.
  - (iv) The School/Centre Board of Study (possibly delegated to a research sub-committee established for the purpose): whose role is to exercise general oversight over student progress, approve programmes of study and monitor the general research environment for students and staff.
  - (v) The Research Degrees Administrator (the Quality Assurance Administrator (Research Degrees) and Secretary to the Board of Studies for Research Degrees): whose role is to administer central responsibilities related to admissions, enrolment and re-enrolment, fee invoicing, bursary payments, research degree registration, progress monitoring, programme approval, thesis presentation and examination.
  - (vi) The Research Student Administrator in each School/Centre Administrative office: whose role is to administer School/Centre responsibilities relating to enquiries, admissions, enrolment and re-enrolment, fee invoicing, bursary arrangements and School/Centre Standing Panels for research students.
  - (vii) The Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement: whose role is to implement and oversee all policies and procedures relating to research degree management, quality assurance and the monitoring of research student progress.
  - (viii) The Board of Studies for Research Degrees: whose role is to ensure the maintenance of the academic standards of programmes of study leading to the award of degrees by research, including the control of all matters relating to the registration, supervision and examination of research students. (The Board functions with the aid of Standing Panels established in each School/Centre which consider in detail and report to the Board on initial registration, transfer from MPhil to PhD, mid-programme assessment for PhD direct candidates, and annual progress.)
- 1.3 The major stages of a research degree programme which all research students must go through are:
- (i) Admission as a Postgraduate Student by Research.
  - (ii) Enrolment as a Postgraduate Student by Research.

- (iii) Completion of the Project Planning, Postgraduate Induction and Research Student-Supervisor Agreement Forms.
- (iv) Completion of the initial Research Progress Report and Action Plan
- (v) Registration of the Proposed Programme of Study. (Form R1, R1 (PD) for Professional Doctorates, or R1 (PW) for PhD by Published Work or R1 (Prac) for PhD by Practice
- (vi) Completion of the Annual Research Progress Report and Action Plan
- (vii) Approval of Transfer of Registration from MPhil to PhD (if applicable) or Mid-Programme Assessment for PhD direct candidates.
- (viii) Thesis Presentation.
- (ix) Examination.

These stages are described below in paragraphs 1.4 to 1.12.

#### 1.4 Admission as a Postgraduate Student by Research

A flowchart depicting the administration of the admissions process is shown in Annex 1. Note that the School/Centre role in this process is fulfilled by the (proposed) Director of Studies, the Research Team Leader and the Director of School/Centre, whose functions are briefly described in 1.2 above. Further details of the admissions process and individual responsibilities within it are given in the Research Degree Regulations\* and the Code of Practice for Research Students and Supervisors. Through the Research Degrees Administrator, all research student admissions are subject to approval by the Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement who authorises the sending of an offer letter to each successful applicant (except for Professional Doctorate candidates, whose admission is the responsibility of Schools/Centres).

#### 1.5 Enrolment as a Postgraduate Student by Research

Once a person is accepted as a research student they should be enrolled with the University and pay the appropriate fee. Enrolment is carried out by the Research Degrees Administrator in the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit, except for Professional Doctorate students, who are enrolled in the same way as students enrolling for

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\* The Research Degree Regulations are supplemented for relevant candidates by the Regulations and Procedures Governing the Award of PhD by Published Work or by the Professional Doctorates Framework: Principles and Regulations.

other taught programmes. At the time of enrolment, every student will be issued with a student identity card entitling them to full use of University facilities (library, computing etc). They will also be issued with an induction pack containing copies of (or reference to) all relevant documents relating to their research programme of study, including the Research Degree Regulations and the Postgraduate Skills Record.

## 1.6 **Project Planning, Postgraduate Induction and the Research Student-Supervisor Agreement**

- 1.6.1 The above forms are included within the Postgraduate Skills Record. The Project Planning and Postgraduate Induction forms are designed to ensure that early attention is paid to defining and agreeing the main parameters of the intended research, encompassing academic issues and ethical, risk and health and safety considerations, as appropriate, and to familiarising students with the environment, facilities, personnel and procedures which support their research. Copies of the completed forms must be submitted to the Research Degrees Administrator (or the designated School/Centre officer in the case of Professional Doctorate candidates).
- 1.6.2 The Research Student-Supervisor Agreement, which all research students and supervisors are required to complete as soon as possible after initial enrolment (or after commencement of the research stage in the case of Professional Doctorate candidates), is the important first stage of the University's formal progress monitoring. It should be completed after consultation between student and supervisor and should be looked at by the Research Team Leader or other relevant Research Manager so that any individual requirements necessary for the carrying out of the research programme are approved at School/Centre level. There should be full discussion of the research programme and the conditions/ training necessary for it to be carried out (including any ethical, health, safety and risk assessment considerations), prior to the completion of the Agreement and full details of these conditions, together with agreed target dates and supervisory arrangements should be entered on the form. The form will also record that the Annual Progress Report and Action Plan has been issued to each student, as part of the Postgraduate Skills Record, for eventual completion in conjunction with the supervisor.
- 1.6.3 Once the Research Student-Supervisor Agreement has been submitted to the Research Degrees Administrator (or to the designated School/Centre officer in the case of Professional Doctorate candidates), a copy will be kept in the student's file and a confirmed copy will be returned to both the student and the supervisor. The agreement will then be used as a reference

point from which to monitor progress with the research and to ensure that appropriate conditions have been established for the research to be carried out. The Board of Studies for Research Degrees may examine individual agreements at the time of the submission of a proposal to register a programme of study for a research degree or in individual cases where progress monitoring reveals problems which require investigation. It is therefore vital that students, supervisors and Research Team Leaders or other relevant Research Managers establish with as much accuracy as is possible the conditions under which the proposed research will take place and have a shared understanding of the obligations on all sides. On this basis, a common understanding of the research programme for each student, which is subject to external verification and checking, can be formally logged, thus enabling progress monitoring and quality assurance to be carried out openly.

### 1.7 **Registration of the Proposed Programme of Study for a Research Degree (see Annex 2)**

All research students must submit their proposed programme of study to the Board of Studies for Research Degrees for approval. This should be done on Form R1 (Form R1 (PD) for Professional Doctorate candidates Form R1 (PW) for candidates for PhD by Published Work) or Form R1 (Prac) or Candidates for PhD by Practice within six months of initial enrolment as a research student (or commencement of the research stage for Professional Doctorate candidates) in the case of full-time students and nine months in the case of part-time students. The Quality Assurance Administrator (Research Degrees) will carry out regular progress checks of each individual student's status for evidence of research degree proposals being ready for submission to the Board of Studies for Research Degrees (except in the case of Professional Doctorate candidates, where this responsibility falls to designated School/Centre personnel).

Full details of the process of research degree proposal preparation and submission are given in the Research Degree Regulations (especially Section 3) (and supplementary regulations for Professional Doctorates and PhD by Published Work or Practice). Guidance on preparing a proposal is given in the booklets, Submitting A Proposal for Registration for the Degree of Master of Philosophy or Doctor of Philosophy and the Code of Practice for Research Students and Supervisors. Further information is provided in Procedures and Notes for Guidance on Applications to Register for a Research Degree. Students should consult these sources before presenting a proposal and work closely with their supervisor when formulating their research topic.



## 1.8 The Annual Research Progress Report and Action Plan

- 1.8.1 Building upon the Research Student-Supervisor Agreement, the University's quality assurance procedures lay down certain formal progress monitoring requirements together with a requirement that both student and supervisor reflect upon and document the development of the research and their academic relationship for their own mutual understanding and clarification. Central to these processes are the Annual Research Progress Report and Action Plan and the formal monitoring points at which the Board of Studies for Research Degrees will require evidence of satisfactory progress.
- 1.8.2 The Annual Research Progress Report and Action Plan is the documentary record of research progress as seen by both the student and the main supervisor or Director of Studies. It is therefore meant to be evaluative as well as to record factually the progress made against agreed targets. First and foremost therefore the record should be seen as an aid to the research student and supervisor in identifying issues and problems, target-setting and clarifying mutual perceptions of how the research and the supervisor-student relationship is progressing. It also enables external authorities, namely the Board of Studies for Research Degrees and the relevant School/Centre Research Committee or equivalent, to monitor individual student progress, check that supervisory and training arrangements are appropriate (and conform to those noted in the Research Student-Supervisor Agreement) and pinpoint any cases of individual concern.
- 1.8.3 At enrolment (or at commencement of the research stage for Professional Doctorate candidates), every research student will be directed towards where they may access an electronic version of the Postgraduate Skills Record which contains or refers to all of the key proformas referred to here, including the Annual Research Progress Report and Action Plan.
- 1.8.4 The Annual Research Progress Report and Action Plan should be completed within 2-4 months of initial enrolment (or of commencement of the research stage for Professional Doctorate candidates) and then each year by every research student in consultation with their main supervisor. The supervisor should ensure that the review is initially submitted to the Research Degrees Administrator (or, for Professional Doctorate candidates, to the designated member of staff) because re-enrolment for the subsequent year of programme will not be permitted unless a report has been received. It will be the responsibility of the Research Team Leader or

designated Research Manager/Course Leader to make sure that annual progress reviews of every research student for whom they are responsible are completed and submitted as required each year. A Standing Panel of the School/Centre Research Committee or equivalent will consider the progress of students, follow-up any issues arising from the progress reviews and report formally to the Board of Studies for Research Degrees (or to the relevant School/Centre Assessment Board in the case of Professional Doctorate candidates) on research student progress every year. The Research Progress Report and Action Plan is therefore to be of use to both the student and supervisor in checking progress and forward planning but is also an obligatory requirement of the progress monitoring arrangements.

- 1.8.5 Research Progress Monitoring forms are primarily for the benefit of students and their supervisors so that they can record areas for development and/or concern and agree on the course the research should be taking and any necessary actions by either side. They will not normally be seen by anyone other than the student or the supervisor but may be called upon in cases where lack of progress is reported to the Board of Studies for Research Degrees (or to the relevant School/Centre Assessment Board in the case of Professional Doctorate candidates) (Research Degree Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Students and Supervisors refer), or where there are complaints about supervisory arrangements under the Student Grievance Procedures (Code of Practice for Research Students and Supervisors refers). Research Progress Monitoring forms are therefore to be used as a log and to contain both student and supervisor comments about the progress of the research and the outcomes of supervisory meetings.

## 1.9 **Progress Monitoring Timetable**

A research student's progress will be monitored by the supervisor and the Research Team Leader or other relevant Research Manager/Course Leader on a regular basis and will be subject to the formal monitoring procedures of the Board of Studies for Research Degrees, using the Research Student-Supervisor Agreement and the Annual Research Progress Report and Action Plan, together with additional information from supervisors where necessary, as evidence of satisfactory progress. The schedule of institutional monitoring by the Board of Studies for Research Degrees will be controlled by the Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement and implemented via the Quality Assurance Administrator (Research Degrees) (or via the designated School/Centre officers for Professional Doctorate Candidates) and will be as follows:

- (i) 1-2 months after Enrolment: Check Project Planning, Postgraduate Induction and Research Student-Supervisor Agreement have been completed.
- (ii) 2-4 months after Enrolment: Check Annual Research Progress Report and Action Plan has been completed and progress has been made with preparation of research degree proposal for submission to the Board of Studies for Research Degrees. Follow-up cases of slow progress with supervisors.
- (iii) 12 monthly intervals: Formal progress monitoring by the Board of Studies for Research Degrees (via its School/Centre Standing Panels), based upon the Annual Research Progress Report and Action Plan.
- (iv) 6-9 months after Enrolment Check progress with preparation of research degree proposal
- (v) Research Degree Transfer/ Mid-Programme Assessment or Completion: As described below

**1.10 Approval of Transfer of Registration from Master of Philosophy (MPhil) to Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) or Mid-Programme Assessment for PhD Direct Candidates (see Annex 2)**

Many research students will register initially for the degree of PhD via MPhil and will have the option of transferring their registration to the degree of PhD subject to progress having been made to the satisfaction of the Board of Studies for Research Degrees. Candidates registered for PhD direct must undergo a similar procedure by way of mid-programme assessment. There is a formal procedure for making and considering transfer requests and mid-programme assessments (including the alternative methods of submitting a progress report or thesis chapters) and this is described in detail in the Research Degree Regulations and in the Procedures and Notes for Guidance on Transfer from Master of Philosophy to Doctor of Philosophy/Mid-Programme Assessment for PhD Direct Candidates.

### 1.11 Thesis Presentation

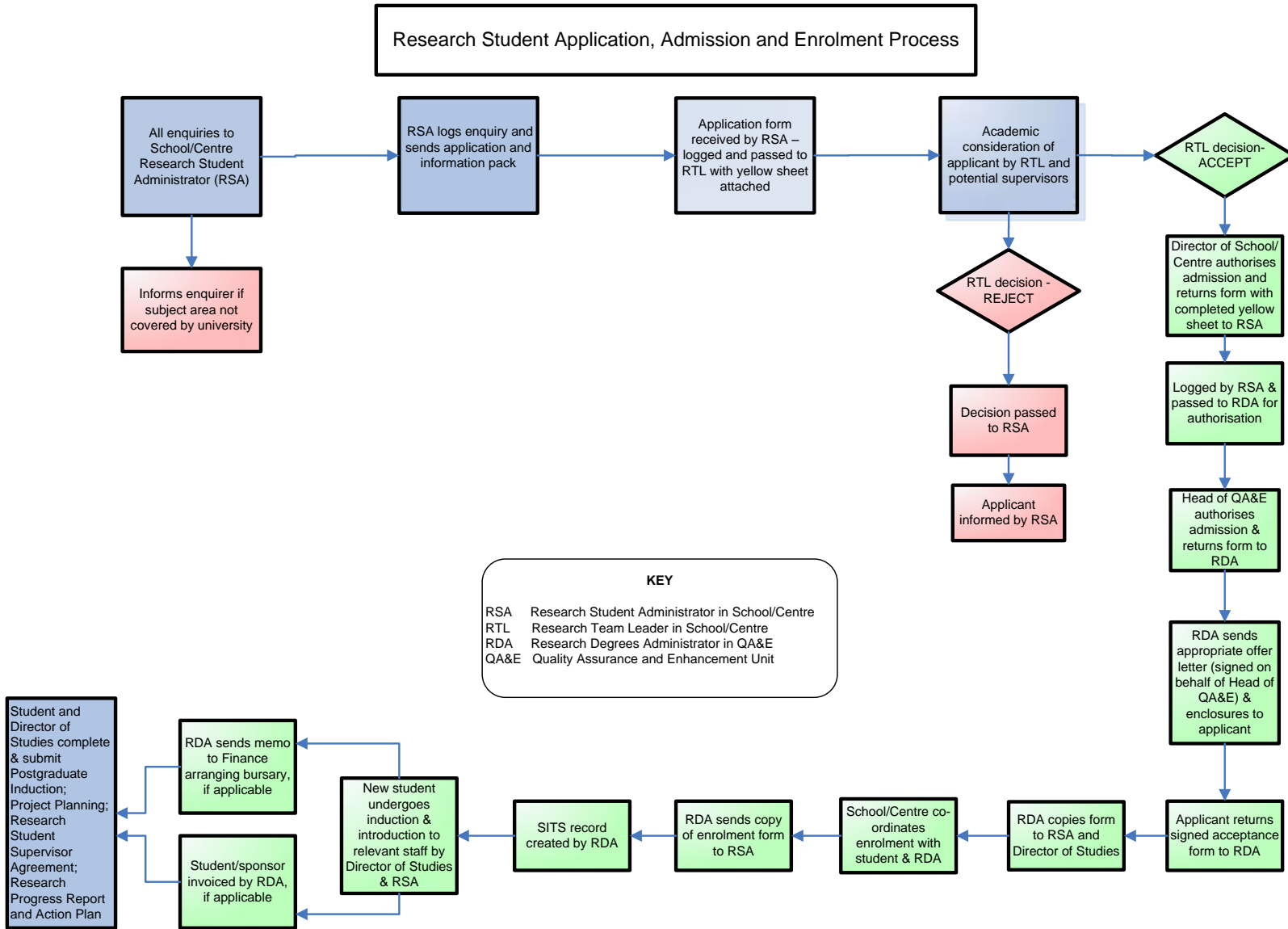
The presentation of the thesis must conform to the requirements laid down in the Research Degree Regulations (including supplementary regulations for Professional Doctorates or PhD by Published Work or Practice). Guidance on writing up and submission of theses is contained in the Code of Practice for Research Students and Supervisors.

### 1.12 Examination

Regulations relating to the examination of Research Degree theses are specified in the Research Degree Regulations and relevant protocols are outlined in the Guidance Notes for the Examination of Research Degree Candidates. Procedures relating to appeal against the outcome of an examination are also described in the Regulations.

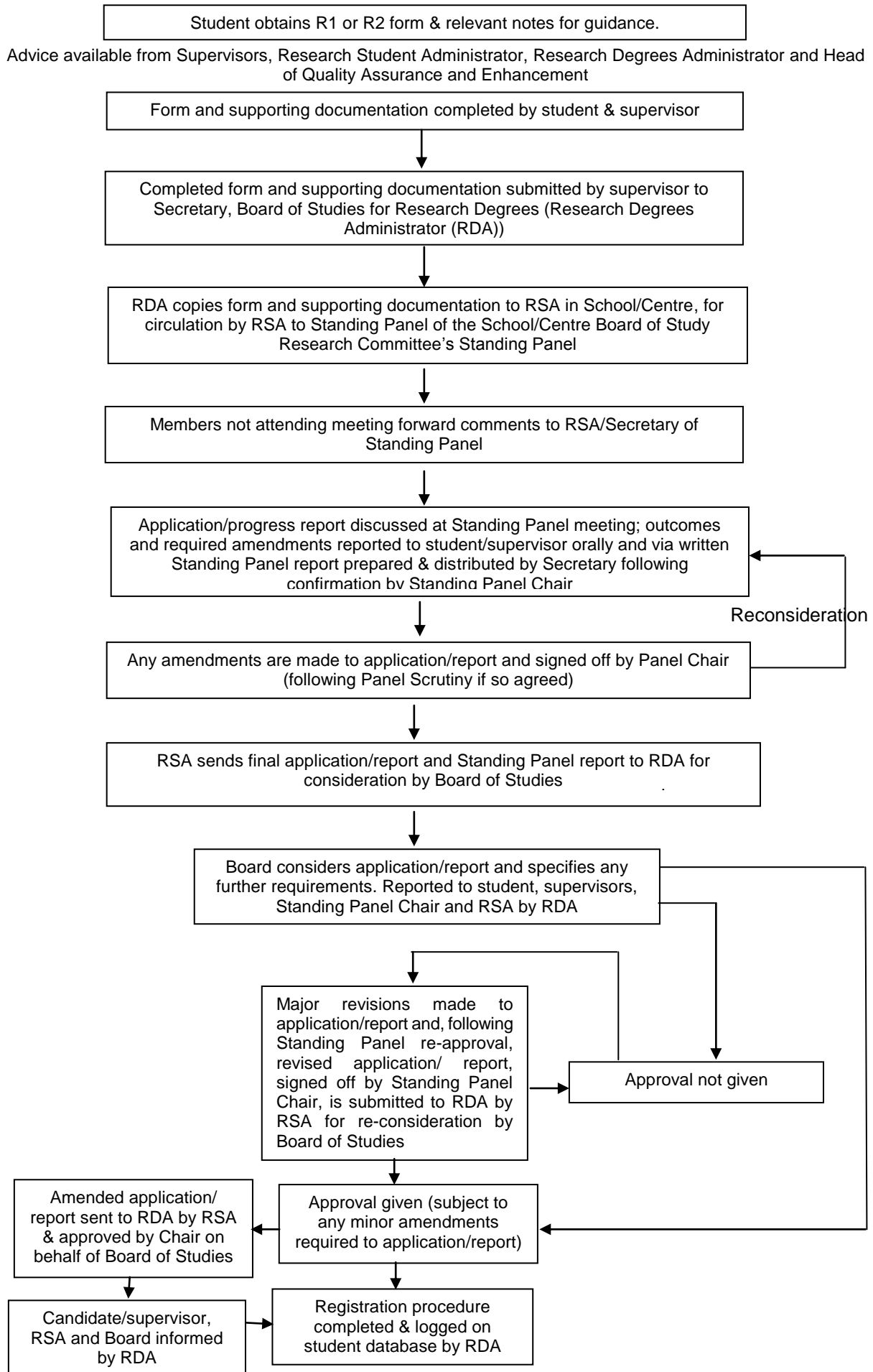
### 1.13 Procedures Relating to Research Student Problems and Grievances

The University has formal procedures for dealing with problems and/or grievances which may arise during the course of a research student's programme of study. These procedures are described in the Code of Practice for Research Students and Supervisors. Procedures to be followed in the event of unsatisfactory performance leading to a recommendation that a student's registration be terminated are described in the Research Degree Regulations.



**Annex 2**

**Procedures for Considering Research Degree Proposals, MPhil to PhD Transfers and Mid-Programme Assessments**



**List of Candidates'/Supervisors' Proformas**

Application Form for Admission to the University of Bolton as a Research Student [word]

Postgraduate Skills Record with Research Planning and Achievement [word]

R1 - Application to register for a Research Degree [word]

R1 - (PD) - Application to Register for a Professional Doctorate Award [word]

R1 - (PW) - Application to register for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Published Work [word]

R1 - (Prac) - Application to Register for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy - by practice [word]

R2 - Application for transfer of registration from Master of Philosophy to Doctor of Philosophy (R2) or Mid-Programme Assessment for PhD direct candidates [word]

R3 - Application for Notification of Extension/Suspension of Period of Registration [word]

R4 - Application for change in approved arrangements for supervision [word]

R5 - Application for Approval of Examination Arrangements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy [word]

R6 - Application for change in approved mode of study [word]

R7 - Notification of Withdrawal of Registration [word]

R8 - Notification of the intention to submit a thesis [word]

R9 - Request to alter the title of research programme of study [word]

R10 - Candidate's Declaration Form [word]

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## Research Degrees and Research Students

### Examiners' Proformas

**NOTE - Examiners are strongly requested to text process their reports.**

Claim for External Examiner (Research Viva) (Form F1)[\[word\]](#)

Confirmation of a Candidate's Fulfilment of the Conditions Arising from a Research Degree Oral Examination (Form E3)[\[word\]](#)

Preliminary Report and Recommendation of an Examiner on a candidate for the degree of Master of Philosophy (E-MPHIL.1) [\[word\]](#)

Recommendation of the Examiners on a candidate for the degree of Master of Philosophy (E-MPHIL.2) [\[word\]](#)

Preliminary Report and Recommendation of an Examiner on the Re-examination of a candidate for the degree of Master of Philosophy (E-MPHIL.3) [\[word\]](#)

Recommendation of the Examiners on the Re-examination of a candidate for the degree of Master of Philosophy (E-MPHIL.4) [\[word\]](#)

Preliminary Report and Recommendation of an Examiner on a Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (E-PHD.1) [\[word\]](#)

Recommendation of the Examiners on a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (E-PHD.2) [\[word\]](#)

Preliminary Report and Recommendation of an Examiner on the Re-examination of a Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (E-PHD.3) [\[word\]](#)

Recommendation of the Examiners on the Re-examination of a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (E-PHD.4) [\[word\]](#)

Research Degree Regulations [\[pdf\]](#)

Research Degree Examination by Video Conferencing [\[pdf\]](#)

Guidance Notes for the Oral Examination of Research Degree Candidates [\[pdf\]](#)



## **Research Degrees and Research Students**

Follow the link below to access Research Documents, Research Candidates' Proformas and Research External Examiner documents

<http://www.bolton.ac.uk/Quality/QAECContents/ResearchDegreesAndStudents/Home.aspx>