

POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH HANDBOOK

Chapter 6 - PGR Liaison Forums - Code of Good Practice

[Partner Institutions: All partner institutions delivering programmes validated by the University of Exeter are required to observe this code of good practice.]

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. Whilst study as a Postgraduate research student can be a very individual activity, and as such it is important that there are confidential opportunities to provide feedback (such as through the TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 7: Annual Monitoring Review process), as a community, students also play an important role in affecting improvements to the quality of the student experience.
- 1.2. PGR liaison forums are a mechanism designed to facilitate that process of creative engagement with the student experience, ensuring that issues and suggestions may be considered by the postgraduate research student community and staff.
- 1.3. PGR liaison forums are the equivalent of the student-staff liaison committees run for students on taught programmes, although the structure of PGR liaison forums is designed to reflect the needs of postgraduate research students.
- 1.4. The Board of Postgraduate Research considers that at this level of study, students should feel able to take ownership of this engagement and accordingly whilst this Code

lays out broad parameters for the operation of liaison forums, students are encouraged to establish these groups in the ways which best meet their needs, and to feel free to revise them.

2. Principles

- 2.1. All PGR students should have a forum at Faculty, Department, discipline, programme or research group level, which is open to all PGR students, that includes staff representation, and for which records of the discussion are kept. If there is a PGR liaison forum at both Faculty level and at discipline, programme or research group level, each of the disciplinary etc. forums in the Faculty should be represented on this Faculty forum.
- 2.2. Each forum will appoint a Chair (who may be a Postgraduate Research Student Representative or DPGR) who will represent those students who cannot attend and will represent the group within the discipline and Faculty ([see 6.2](#)).
- 2.3. The Students' Guild and the Students' Union will each invite every Postgraduate Research Student Representative registered for a course on their respective campuses to a meeting at least once per quarter, where they will have the opportunity to raise issues with members of the senior management team in the Doctoral College.

3. Aims and Objectives of a PGRLF

- 3.1. To enable graduate research students and staff jointly to participate in improving the quality of graduate research student provision.
- 3.2. To facilitate communication between postgraduate research students and staff within a discipline, research group, or doctoral training partnership.
- 3.3. To identify and address areas of concern to postgraduate research students and staff.
- 3.4. To assist postgraduate research student contributions at all levels of decision-making concerning unreserved business within the department, discipline and Faculty.

- 3.5. To disseminate examples of good practice.
- 3.6. To provide documentary evidence of the participation of postgraduate research students in the quality assurance and development of the postgraduate research programmes delivered by the department, discipline and Faculty.
- 3.7. To assist in the inclusion of all new and existing postgraduate research students into academic networks, and the development of those networks.
- 3.8. To facilitate communication with regard to action taken against feedback received from postgraduate research students.

4. Faculty Process

- 4.1. Each Faculty shall have as many PGRLFs as the students within that Faculty's individual disciplines and research groups consider necessary and appropriate to properly represent their interests, taking account of the range of and diversity of the postgraduate research provision within the Faculty. Since there are PGRLFs at discipline level, the Faculty needs to ensure that there are clear and effective reporting mechanisms into the wider Faculty processes.
- 4.2. The action plan of PGRLF meetings should be a standing item on the agenda of the Faculty's senior committee responsible for postgraduate research students.
- 4.3. An appointed Postgraduate Research Student Representative ([see 5.3](#)) will be invited to attend the senior committee responsible for postgraduate research students within the discipline and Faculty for the discussion of relevant PGRLF action plan. Disciplines and Faculties should ensure that any calendar of committee meetings facilitates timely discussion of issues raised by PGRLFs where possible.

- 4.4. Any appointed Postgraduate Research Student Representative of the PGRLF should be invited to submit an annual report to the discipline and Faculty senior committee responsible for postgraduate research provision.
- 4.5. The Doctoral College will inform the Students' Guild or the Students' Union of the number, coverage (i.e. which groups of students are represented by which PGRLF) and constitution of the PGRLFs.

5. PGRLF Membership

- 5.1. Membership of a PGRLF should be open to the entire postgraduate research student cohort within a discipline/Faculty. Only where the sheer number of postgraduate research students renders such open membership impossible to administer should a ballot be conducted to elect members of the PGRLF from among the entire cohort.
- 5.2. Any election held under 5.1 should be held in terms two or three to ensure continuity of representation over the summer, although election of representatives from stage one of postgraduate research programmes will not be possible until term one of the next academic year.
- 5.3. Each PGRLF should have at least one named Postgraduate Research Student Representative (appointed under [7.3](#)) to act as a liaison between the discipline, the Faculty, and the Students' Guild or the Students' Union. They will attend any further discipline, Faculty, Guild or Students' Union meetings that require postgraduate research student representation. The Students' Guild and the Students' Union must inform the Doctoral College of the name of this student(s).
- 5.4. Disciplines/Faculties will nominate a member of staff responsible for each PGRLF.
- 5.5. Staff membership of the PGRLF should not normally exceed six representatives and should not be in the majority.

6. PGRLF Meetings

- 6.1. A PGRLF should meet a minimum of three times a year. This can be outside usual academic term time where required, subject to staff and graduate research student availability.
- 6.2. Where possible, PGRLFs should take full advantage of online meeting technology available to ensure that all reps and cohorts within its remit can be included and represented in meetings, such as for distance learning programmes and degree apprenticeships.
- 6.3. A Postgraduate Research Student Representative (appointed under [7.3](#)) maybe appointed as Chair for each meeting of the PGRLF. Where a Postgraduate Research Student Representative Chair cannot be found, the Department DPGR (or equivalent for the level of PGRLF) shall chair the meeting.
- 6.4. The Chair and staff from the Faculty are responsible for ensuring that the views of all students are represented (e.g. part-time students, international students, and those based off-campus) and should therefore invite feedback from those students who may not be able to attend the meeting in advance of that meeting.
- 6.5. The discipline/Faculty should be responsible for servicing the PGRLF. This should include providing secretarial support should it be necessary (the action plans could be prepared by a student secretary who is not an acting Postgraduate Research Student Representative) and managing the dissemination of action plans to appropriate discipline/Faculty meetings, the Students' Guild and the Students' Union.
- 6.6. An Action Plan for the PGR LF must be kept and used to record outputs from all meetings and conversations, such as agreed actions and details of discussions where context or a record of this having taken place is necessary.
- 6.7. All administrative costs should be borne by the Faculty.

- 6.8. Notice of the next meeting and agenda should be emailed to students at least one week before the date of a meeting and/or posted on a relevant online forum such as a SharePoint site.
- 6.9. Meetings of the PGRLF need not have a fixed agenda, although they should receive the results of the PRES survey for consideration when this is available and maintain a critical engagement with the Faculty/University over actions taken in response to these results. In addition, they may wish to discuss the following:
- a. Report on discussion of PGRLF business at the discipline's/Faculty's senior committee responsible for PGR provision;
 - b. Supervision and PGR Pastoral Tutor arrangements;
 - c. Research resources (including Library and IT);
 - d. Researcher Development including training, development, and careers support;
 - e. Research Culture including seminar series, events and equality, diversity and inclusivity.
- 6.10. Each update to the Action Plan following a PGRLF meeting, as approved by the Chair(s), should be posted on a relevant online forum such as a SharePoint site normally within one month of that meeting by the secretary responsible for the PGRLF.
- 6.11. Any member, student or staff, of the Faculty may attend a meeting of a PGRLF as an observer.
- 6.12. The Students' Guild/ Students' Union will attend one PGRLF in each Faculty every academic term.
- 6.13. Each update to an Action Plan following an PGRLF meeting should be forwarded to the Students' Guild/ the Student' Union.

7. Students' Guild and Students' Union

- 7.1. The Students' Guild will offer support to all Postgraduate Research Student Representatives based on the Streatham and St Luke's campuses. The Students' Union

will offer support to all Postgraduate Research Student Representatives based on a Cornwall campus.

- 7.2. The Students' Guild and the Students' Union will each submit a termly report to the Board of Postgraduate Research, summarising issues raised in consultation with Postgraduate Research Student Representatives.
- 7.3. The Students' Guild and Students' Union will be responsible for facilitating the appointment of Postgraduate Research Student Representatives.
 - 7.3.1. Discipline-level Postgraduate Research Student Representative posts will be filled by students who have expressed interest to the Students' Guild or Students' Union and will be selected by postgraduate research students at the discipline level by common agreement amongst themselves. The Students' Guild and Students' Union will play an advisory role in the selection.
- 7.4. Faculty-level Postgraduate Research Student Representative posts, if required, will be selected from amongst the discipline-level representatives for each campus by assent. The Students' Guild and Students' Union will play an advisory role in the selection.
- 7.5. The appointed Postgraduate Research Student Representative is entitled to receive assistance, training and support from the Students' Guild or the Students' Union to inform and support their role. The Students' Guild/ Students' Union and the Faculty team supporting PGRLFs should make the appointed Postgraduate Research Student Representative aware of the person to contact to receive this training.
- 7.6. The appointed Postgraduate Research Student Representative will be invited to represent their department/discipline at meetings run by the Students' Guild and the Students' Union.
- 7.7. The appointed Postgraduate Research Student Representative will be responsible for promoting the role of the PGRLF and any elections held [under 5.1](#).

- 7.8. The appointed Postgraduate Research Student Representative will work with the Students' Guild, the Students' Union and the Faculty to organise any ballot [under 5.1](#).
- 7.9. The responsibility for managing the role description of the appointed Postgraduate Research Student Representative will lie with the Students' Guild and the Students' Union.
- 7.10. Disciplines may require different structures dependent on the nature of their individual postgraduate research methodologies, and minor changes to accommodate these can be communicated to the Students' Guild via the Vice-President Education, or to the Students' Union via the Students' Union Exeter President.
- 7.11. Any significant change to the role description, or the creation of new roles, should be discussed with Postgraduate Research Student Representatives and the Students' Guild/Students' Union.

8. Partner Institutions

- 8.1. The University shall ensure that for all partnership arrangements the students on the programmes in question shall have an opportunity to provide feedback, and to otherwise improve the quality of postgraduate research student provision.