Guidance for supervisors of remote location doctoral researchers

This document has been developed to support supervisors who have responsibility for students who spend a large proportion of their research Off Campus under the auspices of the agreement with King Abdul-Aziz University (KAU). It was instigated in response to a meeting of supervisors of PhD students undertaking research as part of TUOS’s agreement with KAU (14.6.13) and is updated on a yearly basis with the latest advice from current supervisors of remote location research students. It will be useful for supervisors of students from KAU and supervisors of other remote location students.

1. Supervisors should ensure they are familiar with the relevant parts of:

i) The Code of Practice (http://www.shef.ac.uk/ris/pgr/code)

ii) The web pages concerning remote location programmes (http://www.shef.ac.uk/postgraduate/research/away/remote_loc)

iii) The agreement (available from R&IS: newprogrammes@sheffield.ac.uk)

iv) The Research Student Proposition (http://www.shef.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.194478!/file/TUOS_Research_Student_Proposition.pdf)

2. General considerations about remote location PGR students

i) Standard Remote Location students must not spend more than eight consecutive weeks in the UK at any time during the course of their degree. Students that exceed the eight-week limit will have their registration transferred to a standard PhD student, and may be subject to additional fees unless their programme is being undertaken under the auspices of a specific agreement with a partner University (such as KAU)

ii) Care should be taken to ensure that PGR students studying by remote location still benefit from the expectations noted in TUOS Research Student Proposition. In particular it can be challenging to ensure that they have the necessary opportunities to develop intellectually, professionally and personally through the experience of studying at TUOS and to be treated as a member of an intellectually stimulating community of scholars.

iii) Remote location students are not exempt from the DDP. When identifying training for the PGR student thought should be given to how much can be achieved at the remote location and whether or not the student should spend some time visiting TUOS. Experience shows that in order to complete on time it may be beneficial for some students to spend some time at Sheffield, including perhaps a short intensive skills training programme and often this is best done at the start of their studies. Typically TUOS agreements with partner institutions now explicitly stipulate the need for such on site visits. In the event that a remote location student visiting TUOS is in need of desk space, this can be provided by the Graduate Research Centre (http://www.shef.ac.uk/ris/pgr/qrc).
iv) Supervisors should satisfy themselves that the student’s level of English is adequate to maintain a long distance supervisory relationship. TUOS minimum English levels apply but communicating adequately at a distance requires better English language skills than communicating face-to-face. When communicating at a distance (email, skype etc.) it is crucial that the English language ability of the student is adequate.

v) Remote location students can require more supervision than students on other modes of attendance. This can be mitigated by having appropriate support in place at the remote location. Supervisors should ensure that this level of support is adequate and agreed. It is recommended that this done by means of an onsite visit.

3. Specific considerations about the agreement with KAU (relevant also to other Saudi partners)

i) Traditionally the working week in Saudi Arabia is Saturday to Wednesday, with Thursday and Friday as a non-working day.

ii) It is sometimes possible to do research at Saudi Universities that is not possible in the UK, either because of limited resources, or because of different regulatory requirements, however there are some materials which are harder to come by in Saudi than here in the UK. Careful consideration to the materials required for the research project, and their availability in Saudi, at the outset of the programme will ensure that lengthy delays (and sometimes large additional cost) can be avoided. If it is more feasible for the student to complete some work at TUOS then enhanced fees should be charged to cover any additional costs, such as specialist training, use of laboratories and other facilities and consumables ordered. Fees can be charged pro rata for time spent in Sheffield or as an annual fee. Fees should be fully justified; a breakdown of expenditure may be requested by the sponsor. As a guide, fees for laboratory-based projects are currently (July 2015) charged at £9-10k per annum.

iii) PGR Students engaged under the JSP agreement between KAU and TUOS are members of staff at KAU and have teaching responsibilities. Supervisors should give due consideration to these teaching responsibilities when assessing the appropriate timescales for research. This might include deciding whether a given student should study part-time or full-time (both of which are permitted under the terms of the agreement with KAU) and the appropriate use of periods of leave of absence during the course of their research. In addition it might be beneficial for KAU PGR students to do a post-Doc sabbatical year at TUOS as this would provide a good opportunity for them to develop as Principal Investigators (away from their teaching responsibilities).

iv) Students and supervisors should be aware that the PhD starts from the moment of registration and that progression milestones and completion dates are measured accordingly. Consideration should be given to any planned visits by the student to this country and the visa implications from the outset.

v) Although initial discussions with potential students are advisable, supervisors should ensure that they do not embark on supervision until the student has registered with TUOS. The agreement with KAU states that “KAU will be responsible for the payment of the tuition fees of its staff who enrol on the programme.” So any work done with the student before their enrolment should be considered ‘at risk’. It is important to note that KAU students still need to complete the online registration forms that other PGR students need to complete and that sometimes administrative efforts to chase these forms can be ineffective.

vi) Potential PGR students on this programme still need to apply as per TUOS guidelines. If the student makes it clear on the application forms that the application is being made under the auspices of the agreement with KAU then this will be picked up by the admissions team.
This is essential to ensure the correct programme details are successfully entered onto the student’s record (fee levels, mode of attendance etc.) and that TUOS is able to invoice KAU in a timely fashion. The Doctoral Development Team should be contacted prior to any application being made (newprogrammes@sheffield.ac.uk).

vii) Because the PGR students engaged under this agreement are staff at KAU they tend to be very good students. This should not be taken as an indication that they are in need of less support than their counterparts attending on other modes of attendance or indeed that the expectations of the Research Student Proposition do not apply (both theirs of us and vice versa).

viii) Supervisors should take full advantage of the opportunities to visit their students at the remote location. The agreement with KAU states that two visits per year will be funded by KAU and that the first visit should occur within the first 6 months of study. Not only does this give the supervisor a chance to see the student’s environment (and thus improve understanding) but also creates an opportunity to develop their network and raise their profile at KAU.

ix) It is highly recommended that potential supervisors should contact one of the current supervisors on this programme to gain insight into best practice and to ensure full advantage is taken of TUOS experience of Saudi culture. If a potential supervisor can arrange a visit to KAU (perhaps as a second supervisor to an existing KAU student) prior to engaging a student this would be very beneficial. A meeting of supervisors on this programme will be held every year to share experiences/ best practice and to ensure peer group support for supervisors. In addition the Doctoral Development Team hold an email list of all supervisors on this programme.

x) The current agreement with KAU is in place for 5 years from 12th January 2016 and will be subject to review 12th January 2020.

For further information on this agreement please contact the Doctoral Development Team via: newprogrammes@sheffield.ac.uk

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