1. **Background**

It was proposed that the approval, governance and quality assurance (QA) of research programmes be reviewed as part of the 2018/19 Quality and Standards workstream, in light of the recent reorganisation of doctoral structures, the revised 2018 QAA Quality Code and stakeholder feedback.

2. **Proposal for programme approval and governance of research programmes**

The current overarching process for new and amended programme approval and governance comprises:

- A single approval process for all research programmes, irrespective of complexity, scope and collaborative elements.
- Due diligence to address the basic financial, ethical and academic considerations related to new collaborative partners.
- Faculty Directors of Research and Innovation (FDRIs) as Faculty-level approvers.
- Consideration by UPGRC as part of RS approval but subsequent submission to Quality and Scrutiny Sub-Committee (QSC) and Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) if Senate approval is required.

There is currently no official means by which amendments to existing research programmes are agreed and no formal point at which Global Engagement (GE) are updated regarding proposed or approved collaborative programmes, resulting in a potential lack of join up with Faculty Internationalisation Leads.

The updated QAA Quality Code\(^1\) states that “the management of partnership arrangements should be in proportion to the level of risk to quality and academic standards posed by the arrangement”.

Following consultation with the Quality and Standards working parties and UPGRC, it is proposed that new programmes are categorised according to their associated risk and undergo a tailored programme approval process as per the diagram in Appendix 1.

This would ensure that:

- Programmes are subject to a level of scrutiny appropriate to their complexity and scope;
- Flexibility is retained for lower risk programmes;
- Adequate time is available for appropriate consideration of proposals;
- Key Professional Services are included at the due diligence and approval notification stages;
- Faculty PGR Leads hold greater responsibility for the programme portfolio, in line with the Hub and Spoke model of Faculty Graduate Schools.

It is further suggested that governance for new and amended research programmes be the responsibility of UPGRC and Research and Innovation Committee (RIC), as detailed in Appendix 2. As such, proposals requiring Senate approval would progress through this route, enabling Faculty and University research strategy to inform decisions regarding new and amended programmes.

Other proposals for consideration:

1. To ensure consistency, the delegated signatories for legally binding Memorandums of Agreement related to research should also, where possible, be the signatories for Memorandums of Understanding relating to research programmes;
2. Standard practice should preclude the signing of agreements until programme approval is confirmed and both measures should be in place prior to student recruitment being undertaken, as per QAA guidance ("Legally-binding written agreements, where required, which set out the rights and obligations of all parties, should be finalised and signed before students register on the associated provision");
3. Faculty-wide programmes be reviewed by FDRI(s) in addition to Faculty PGR Leads to ensure fit with Faculty research priorities and strategies.

\(^1\) [https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code](https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code)
3. Proposal for quality assurance of research programmes

Existing processes and events to support QA include:

- Best Practice Sharing sessions for Departmental and Faculty PGR leads in January and July;
- Biennial Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) to collate student feedback accompanied by subsequent Faculty and Departmental reflections;
- Discussion of submission rate and recruitment data at UPGRC in November.

There is currently limited QA of collaborative programmes subsequent to initial due diligence and programme approval, and formalised departmental reflections have not been undertaken in recent years.

Following analysis of the updated QAA Quality Code\(^1\), alongside consultation with the Quality and Standards working parties and members of UPGRC, it is proposed that QA activities run on a biennial cycle as per the diagram in Appendix 3.

Changes to be incorporated include:

1. Biennial review of collaborative programmes, the outcomes of which would be collated for discussion at UPGRC, available to the RS Programmes team to inform new programme developments and disseminated to other Professional Services (Academic Programmes Office, Student Recruitment and Admissions, and GE) as appropriate;
2. Reintroduction of departmental reflection activity via a meeting between the Departmental and Faculty PGR Leads to facilitate discussion of key metrics (recruitment, submission rate and survey feedback), to take place at least biennially and ideally annually. This should generate an approach for enhancement activities, with a summary of the discussion to be shared with RS for the purposes of identifying cross-Faculty issues. Faculty PGR Leads may choose to follow-up with Departments requiring additional support during Semester 2;
3. The opportunity to collate student feedback around topical issues prior to PGR Lead Best Practice Sharing sessions, where appropriate.
4. Review of Regulations, including programmes with taught elements e.g. EdD, CDTs and DEdCPs. This process would be initiated in February, offsetting Departmental workload relative to the APO Regulatory review cycle, with a mid-March deadline for amendments in the next academic year.

4. Next Steps

Should the Committee approve the proposal, the following would be undertaken:

- Submission for consideration and approval by RIC on 15th May, and Senate on 19th June;
- Further consideration and tailoring of programme approval and due diligence documentation;
- Development of collaborative programme review and annual departmental reflection activities;
- Further consideration regarding the value of PRES versus a Sheffield-designed equivalent survey;
- A reflective review in Summer 19/20 to consider supplementary activities\(^2\);
- Ongoing promotion of the existing Framework for Collaborative Research Provision policy\(^3\).

4. Summary

The Committee is asked to consider and provide comment regarding the above proposals, with a view to approval.

Charley Williams, Research Services

\(^1\)Possibilities include use of external assessors, introduction of a student exit survey, collation of supervisor feedback, inclusion of additional data such as graduate destinations, quality and number of research outputs and average supervisor:student ratios.

\(^2\)https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.785627!/file/Framework_for_Research_Collaborative_Provision.pdf
### Appendix 1. Proposed research programme risk levels and associated approval process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-Collaborative (LOW RISK as standard award)</th>
<th>CDTs/DTPs (LOW-MEDIUM RISK depending on collaborative elements)</th>
<th>Collaborative (risk assigned based on award type and nature of collaboration)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Unusual time limits relative to a standard programme (4 year FT and 8 year PT as standard). | UK based and generally longer term, with structured cohorts. Heads of Research Growth to notify team at bid stage and deadlines determined by call outline so no internal deadline can be set. **Prior to funding application:** approval is sought from FDRI and DVP/VP for R&I (HoDs, Departmental PGR Director and Faculty PGR Director will be involved as part of this). RS to conduct due diligence on new partner HEIs and escalate as appropriate if concern around partners. **Following application:** Official RS "approval" already granted if bid is successful but an operational implementation review is still needed. Operational details submitted for review by PS, then UPGRC review with external Faculty PGR Directors. Once operational RS approval is confirmed, identify Regulatory requirements and seek RIC and Senate approval for those if necessary. | **STANDARD AWARD (MEDIUM RISK):**

1. **Longer-term overarching collaborative agreements for Remote Location supervision across the institution**
   **Deadline by end of Nov for following academic year start,** based on 2 months agreement negotiation and recruitment in Feb. Extended negotiations past 2 months will result in delayed recruitment. **Programme approval:** Approval via Faculty PGR Director(s) at early stages of discussion. Escalate to DVP for R&I as required. Conduct due diligence and seek approval from Faculty Internationalisation Lead(s). Escalate as appropriate if concern around partners. Consult with expert panel if proposed programme structure warrants it. Subsequently follow standard programme approval process: Faculty PGR Director to give approval in principle, Professional Services review, then UPGRC review with external Faculty PGR Directors. Once RS approval is confirmed, identify Regulatory requirements and seek RIC and Senate approval for those as required. **Agreement:** negotiate and finalise during programme approval. Complete with RS signatory when RS/Senate approval is confirmed. **Notification to GE if a new partner is confirmed** (cascade to Faculty Internationalisation Lead(s)).

2. **Co-supervision / split site - may arise as one-off arrangements for <5 students or as a cohort arrangement.** Follow relevant procedure as outlined above but with recognition of reduced risk as a result of smaller student numbers.

**Deadline end of Jan for cohort programmes requiring following academic year start. End of June deadline for one-off arrangements with external funding.**

**For cohort programmes:** approval via HoD and Departmental PGR Director at early stages of discussion. Escalate to DVP for R&I if necessary. Follow programme approval process: Faculty PGR Director to give approval in principle, Professional Services review, then UPGRC review with external Faculty PGR Directors. Once RS approval is confirmed, identify Regulatory requirements and seek RIC and Senate approval for those as required.

**For one-off arrangements (<5 students):** seek approval from HoD, Departmental PGR Director lead and Faculty PGR Director. Escalation to DVP for R&I if necessary. Example: NURR 4.5 year code for NHS trust funded PT students.

Those with taught elements will need additional time flexibility built in for taught approval to be processed by Academic Programmes Office.
New type of structure e.g. training (EdD), accreditation (DEdCPsy), location (e.g. majority off-campus EngD).

**Deadline by January for following academic year start.**

Approval via HoD and Departmental PGR Director at early stages of discussion. Escalate to DVP for R&I as required. Follow programme approval process: Faculty PGR Director to give approval in principle, Professional Services review, then UPGRC review with external Faculty PGR Directors. Once RS approval is confirmed, identify Regulatory requirements and seek RIC and Senate approval for those as required.

Those with taught elements will need additional time flexibility built in for taught approval to be processed by Academic Programmes Office.

**COLLABORATIVE AWARD (HIGH RISK):**

1. Externally funded, one-off collaborative award arrangements for <5 students
   
   **Prior to funding application:** approval via HoD and Departmental PGR Director at early stages of discussion. Escalate to DVP for R&I if double degree required. Conduct due diligence and escalate as appropriate if concern around partners. RS to sign letter of commitment where needed.
   
   **Following application:** seek approval for agreement from HoD, Departmental PGR Director and Faculty PGR Director. RS sign final agreement and set up programme code. **Notification to GE if a new partner is confirmed.**

   Examples: *H2020 Marie Curie ITN European Joint Doctorates (get list of potential programmes from Senior Pricing Assistant (RS) in the summer and ongoing until Jan.)* *EU research council funding e.g. NWO.*

2. Longer-term, internally funded collaborations for student cohorts e.g. Kobe, Tohoku.

   **Deadline by end of Oct for following academic year start,**
   
   based on 3 months agreement negotiation and recruitment in Feb. Extended negotiations past 3 months will result in delayed recruitment. **Programme approval:** Approval via HoD and Departmental PGR Director at early stages of discussion. Escalate to DVP for R&I if double degree required. Conduct due diligence and seek approval from Faculty Internationalisation Lead(s). Escalate as appropriate if concern around partners.

   Consult with expert panel if proposed programme structure warrants it. Subsequently follow standard programme approval process: Faculty PGR Director to give approval in principle, Professional Services review, then UPGRC review with external Faculty PGR Directors. Once RS approval is confirmed, identify Regulatory requirements and seek RIC and Senate approval for those as required.

   **Agreement:** negotiate and finalise during programme approval. Complete with RS signatory when RS/Senate approval is confirmed. **Notification to GE if a new partner is confirmed** (cascade to Faculty Internationalisation Lead(s)).
Appendix 2. Proposed governance route for new and amended research programmes

For the purposes of this diagram Regulatory changes are defined as follows:

- **Minor**: limited changes to programme specifications and/or programme regulations at a departmental level e.g. changes of programme code and limited module changes such as credit balancing. Full approval confirmed by DVP for R&I, which is subsequently noted to RIC. *NB: this is subject to all specific programme code information being removed from the General Regulations for Higher Degrees by Research and transferred into Programme Regulation format.*

- **Major**:
  - Fundamental changes to programme specification and/or programme regulations at a departmental level e.g. extension to time limit, module restructuring, complete rewriting of learning outcomes
  - Regulatory input for Faculty-level programmes
  - Changes to the General Regulations for Higher Degrees by Research.

Such changes should be considered by UPGRC either via remote review or Committee meeting, as appropriate. Should changes to the General Regulations for Higher Degrees by Research be needed, or should the individual programme warrant further scrutiny, RIC input and approval should be sought before progression onto Senate. This protocol shall also apply to new programmes.
Appendix 3. Proposed quality assurance cycle for research programmes

- **FPGR Lead**: informal meeting with departments to review impact of previous QA activities and discuss forward-facing issues, challenges, and potential solutions, based on data arising from the QA cycle. To take place at least every two years.
- **RS**: liaise with FPGR leads to identify and collate cross-Faculty issues and items for discussion at UPGRC.
- **UPGRC**: submission rate and recruitment data discussion.
- **UPGRC and Faculties**: findings of PRES (A year) or collaborative programme review (B year) with recommendations at University and Faculty level, as appropriate. Previous annual cycle of QA activities reviewed and upcoming cycle agreed and subsequently announced to Departments.
- **RS**: distil and analyse result of PRES (A year) or collaborative programme review (B year).
- **RS**: PGR Lead Best Practice Sharing session – thematic element-based. Underpinning student feedback gathered where appropriate.
- **RS**: initiate review and update of Regulations.
- **A year**
  - **RS**: Faculties and departments: survey every 2 years, either PRES or Sheffield-based.
- **B year**
  - **RS**: review of collaborative programmes. To include student and staff feedback, and analysis of key data e.g. submission rates.
- **FPGR Lead**: targeted support for departments where needed, as identified in semester 1 meeting.