

University of Birmingham

**Proposed Changes to the Codes of Practice for Supervision & Monitoring Progress of
Researchers and Assessment of Research Degree Theses**

Purpose of the Paper

1. At the May 2011 meeting of U-QAEC they approved the proposal for implementation in 2011-12 of a process for addressing plagiarism in research degree theses. As a result a number of changes are required to the following Codes of Practice:

Code of Practice for the Supervision of Research Degree Students
Code of Practice for the Assessment of Research Degree Theses

APRC is asked to **consider**, and if thought appropriate, **approve** the proposed changes to Regulations and Code of Practice to be effective from the beginning of 2011-12.

Proposal

2. Changes are proposed to the following and are outlined in the appendices:

Appendix A - Code of Practice for the Supervision of Research Degree Students:

Section 3: Monitoring & Review of Progress points - 3.2; new point 3.3; 3.4
Section 4: Responsibilities of Schools new points - 4.13 and 4.14
Section 5: Responsibilities of Lead Supervisors points - 5.1.8 and 5.19
Direct responsibilities of supervisors points - 5.2.1
Section 6: Responsibilities of research students point - 6.2.11

Appendix B - Code of Practice for the Assessment of Research Degree Theses:

Section 2 Nomination of Examiners - points 2.1; 2.2 and 2.3

Text that is proposed should be deleted from 2011-12 has been crossed through and new text to be inserted is underlined and emboldened.

Background information and Consultation

3. The College of Social Sciences approached the Graduate School Management Board Chair regarding the issue of PGR plagiarism during spring 2010. The College was concerned about a number of cases which had arisen where PhD examiners had identified plagiarism in doctoral researcher theses. As a result the College was keen to institute additional practices which would identify and prevent such plagiarism taking place before the submission of a thesis.

The issue of PGR plagiarism also arose at the Staff Plagiarism Forum which took place on 3rd November 2010. Staff in attendance raised concerns about the increased risk to the reputation of the University now that submitting theses to the E-thesis repository was mandatory for all PGRs.

As a result the University Graduate School, in consultation particularly with colleagues in the College of Social Sciences, drafted a process for addressing PGR plagiarism which was first discussed at the November 2010 GSMB meeting and subsequently amended and approved by GSMB at their January 2011 meeting.

The process approved by U-QAEC is detailed in Appendix C.

The proposed changes to the above Codes of Practice are intended to formalise the approved process to ensure that Schools, supervisors and PGRs are aware of and clear about the requirements placed upon them.

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Proposed changes to the Code of Practice for the Supervision & Monitoring Progress of Research Students

Section 3 - Monitoring & Review of Progress

3.2 The progress of all full and part-time postgraduate researchers, irrespective of whether they are normally registered or writing up, should be monitored regularly at School level. The arrangements for such monitoring may vary according to the subject discipline, the size of the School and the number of postgraduate researchers. However, the academic progress of postgraduate researchers should be formally monitored at least once in the academic year for all students.

3.3 In accordance with the Code of Practice on Plagiarism each School should distribute written guidance to postgraduate researchers on starting their programme as to what constitutes adequate referencing and plagiarism, particularly within a subject-specific context, and on how to reference work properly. Each School must establish mechanisms to ensure that at least one interim report is checked for plagiarism via Turnitin and the outcome discussed with the supervisory team and reported up in the annual progress review.

3.3.4 Form GRS3 "Progress Review" may be used for the purpose of monitoring progress. The process should take into account the written comments made by the supervisor(s) and postgraduate researcher on this form. The following issues should be considered:

- Summary of progress, including inadequate progress, work not up to the required standard.
- Assessment of the above by the supervisor(s).
- Whether the postgraduate researcher is likely to submit within the period of study set out in the regulations for their qualification and/or award of grant from a sponsor or Research Council.
- Schedule for future work.
- Any problems encountered (e.g. access to resources, personal difficulties) and appropriate action taken.
- Follow up on any issues from the previous review period.
- Progress towards meeting the skills listed in the Training Needs Analysis.
- **The outcome of any reports submitted through Turnitin.**

Section 4. Responsibilities of Schools

4.13 To provide clear documentation to postgraduate researchers at the start of each academic year confirming the process for checking work for plagiarism and that the thesis may be run through Turnitin by the School at any point during the registration period.

4.14 To have mechanisms in place for the checking of a random selection of at least 10% of thesis submissions each year via Turnitin.

Section 5 Responsibilities of Supervisors, Academic Advisors and mentors

5.1 The lead supervisor is responsible for:

5.1.8. **On receipt of the Intention to Submit Form to sign the form to acknowledge the intended submission and to make arrangements for the thesis to be submitted via Turnitin if selected as part of the School's 10% random check for plagiarism. Forwarding the signed Intention to Submit Form to the Research Student Administration Team. In signing the form the supervisor is not confirming that the thesis is fit for submission or that the submission will be successful.**

5.1.9 Making preliminary arrangements, in conjunction with the Head of School, in advance of the submission of the thesis, for the nomination of internal and external examiner(s) of the thesis, and in advance of the viva, for the nomination of a chairperson.

5.2 The direct responsibilities of the supervisors to the student include

5.2 1. Giving guidance on the following: the nature of research and the standards expected (including standards of presentation, e.g. in relation to referencing and presenting bibliographic information), the planning of the research programme, literature and sources, attendance at taught classes, research techniques required and arranging for training where necessary, progress, publication of results, intellectual property rights, ethical, **academic writing skills to avoid unintentional plagiarism** and plagiarism issues.

Section 6: Responsibilities of Research Students

6.2 11 **Advising the supervisor of the proposed date of submission by submitting** Presenting a "Notice of Intention to Submit a Thesis" form to the Research Team in Students Services, The Academic Services at least three months before they are due to submit their theses, in order that arrangements for the nomination of examiners may commence.

Proposed changes to the Code of practice for the Assessment of Research Degree Theses

Section 2 Nomination of Examiners

2.1 Postgraduate researchers are required to submit to Research Student Administration a “Notice of Intention to Submit a Thesis” form at least three months before they intend to submit their thesis **to the supervisor**, in order **for the supervisor to acknowledge the impending submission and so** that the nomination of examiners can be sought. **The supervisor should forward the signed Intention to Submit Form to the Research Student Administration Team. In signing the form the supervisor is not confirming that the thesis is fit for submission or that the submission will be successful.**

2.2. The supervisor will make arrangements for the thesis to be submitted via Turnitin if selected as part of the School’s 10% random check for plagiarism.

2.2 ~~3~~ The receipt by Research Student Administration of the Registered Student’s “Notice of Intention to Submit a Thesis” form will trigger the nomination process. However, it is expected that supervisor(s) and Schools will have begun the process on an informal basis during the final stages of the completion of the thesis by the postgraduate researcher. (see also paragraph 5.1(h) Code of Practice: Supervision and Monitoring of Progress of Postgraduate Researchers).

2.3 ~~4~~ On receipt of this form Research Student Administration will send a “Nomination of Examiners for Research Degrees” form to the postgraduate researcher’s Head of School for their completion and approval. Where the latter is also the postgraduate researchers supervisor, the nomination should be approved by the member of academic staff within the School with responsibility for postgraduate researchers. The completed form **should confirm if the thesis has been selected for checking via Turnitin and** should be returned with any supporting documentation, where appropriate, to Research Student Administration. If any section of the form is incomplete, it will be returned to the relevant Head of School or member of academic staff with responsibility for research Registered Students. If any exceptional cases have been made (see paragraph 4.1 of this Code of Practice) Research Student Administration will be responsible for transmission to the Research Progress and Awards Sub-Panel for consideration. **Where a thesis has been selected as part of the School’s random 10% sample, it will not be sent for examination until the check via Turnitin has been completed and the outcome reviewed.**

PGR Plagiarism Checks - Proposed process

The University Graduate School recommends a two pronged approach for dealing with plagiarism in PGR theses.

1) Formative process:

The Supervisory team should play a primary role in educating PGRs about plagiarism, ensuring they have the necessary referencing and academic writing skills to avoid unintentional plagiarism.

Building on the existing progress monitoring system required by University regulations, we recommend that PGRs submit at least one 'interim' report to Turnitin the outcome of which is to be discussed with the Supervisory team and briefly reported upon in a GRS3 or equivalent.

2) Compulsory summative process:

The University Graduate School recommends that the *Notice of Intention to Submit* form be modified so that both the PGR and lead Supervisor's signatures are required. As University regulations outline that the decision to submit the thesis for examination rests solely with the doctoral researcher, wording should be included making clear that by signing the form supervisors are not confirming that the thesis is fit for submission. Instead they are merely acknowledging that they are aware of their PGR's intention to submit. A statement should also be added to the form making clear that by signing this document the PGR is aware that their thesis may be run through Turnitin.

When PGRs register they are asked to agree to the University's term and conditions, this includes the right to submit work to reasonable checking such as the use of electronic detection software. However, to make this complete clear we would also recommend that Schools make clear in the documentation provided to DRs at the start of each academic year that their thesis may be run through Turnitin by the School at any point of their registration period.

We currently require PGRs to submit this form to the Research Student Administration team at least 3 months before they intend to submit their thesis. This three month window should give the Supervisory team enough time to run the PGR's thesis through Turnitin and analyse the results, should it be felt appropriate/necessary by the Supervisory team.

In acknowledgement of the work required to interpret a Turnitin report on a PGR thesis and the added burden this would represent for academic staff, we recommend a system of random checks. We propose that 10% of the total PGR theses submitted within a School be run through Turnitin. This is a recommended minimum.

The implementation of this system, including the spread of the checks throughout the academic year will be left to the School in question to decide. A School can choose to test more than 10% of their PGR theses if they wish as long as it does not unnecessarily lengthen the thesis submission process. Similarly if a Supervisory team has particular concerns about a thesis they can choose to run it through Turnitin. Schools may wish to consider appointing an additional Plagiarism Officer to assist with the coordination of this process.

Having run the necessary checks Schools would then inform the Research Student Administration team of the Turnitin results. Any cases of moderate or severe plagiarism would halt the examination process and the appropriate steps would be taken in line with the *Code of Practice on Plagiarism*.

NOTICE OF INTENTION TO SUBMIT/RESUBMIT*

A RESEARCH DEGREE THESIS

(*Please delete as appropriate)

This form must be completed and submitted to your lead supervisor, at least **three months** before the proposed date for submission.

Please complete using BLOCK CAPITALS and typescript/black ink.

PART A for completion by the PGR

Surname¹

Other name(s)¹ (in full)

Title: Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms² (²delete as appropriate) ID Number

¹The spelling of your name as entered above will be used on your Degree Certificate, which is an official document and, it should match that shown on other official documentation, such as your birth/marriage certificate and passport.

Permanent Address

.....
.....

Tel No Email

Contact Address

.....
.....
.....

From (date) To (date).....

Tel No Email

Please turn over/...

Degree (e.g. PhD, MPhil, etc) for which thesis to be submitted/resubmitted* (*delete as appropriate).....

Programme of Study (e.g. Medicine, Education, Civil Engineering, etc)

Date of entry to research programme of study

School/Department

Supervisor (1)

Supervisor (2)

Staff Status	<i>Please tick as appropriate</i>
Are you a member of staff of the University?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you hold an honorary University Appointment?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Have you been a member of staff of the University?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Have you held an honorary University Appointment?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
If the answer is "Yes" to any of these questions, please state:	
Your Job Title:	
Your Department (if applicable) and Your School:	
Dates of Appointment:	

All Candidates:

Title of thesis

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Proposed date of submission/resubmission* (*delete as appropriate) _____

I am aware that my thesis may be checked through Turnitin.

Signature **Date**

PART B - For completion by the lead supervisor

I acknowledge the proposed submission date.

This thesis has been selected as part of the School's 10% sample to be run through Turnitin YES/NO

Signature **Date**.....

This forward should be sent to the Research Student Administration Team, Academic Services, Aston Webb C Block, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston Birmingham B15 2TT