Supervisor update – sent 30/05/2024

Content at a glance

1. Word Count on submission reminder

There is a maximum word count limit on the submission of a thesis or dissertation as a monograph as follows:
- PhD – **100,000 words**
- MPhil (not as an outcome of the PhD exam) – **60,000 words**
- Masters by Research – **40,000 words**

The word count will vary if an alternative or practice-based format is used. Please refer to **Section 13** of the research degree regulations.

The word count includes references, footnotes and endnotes, but exclude the bibliography and any appendices. If the word count is exceeded, then it may impact the outcome of the examination. It is therefore very important that the word count is discussed prior to submission, either at last review, or 6-month pre-submission interview.

If you have any questions or concerns about word count, please contact the Doctoral School.

2. Guidance on what PGRs are permitted to bring to the viva

The Doctoral School has received a number of queries from both PGRs and academic colleagues around what is permitted to be brought into the viva voce examination. The Doctoral School has created some guidance around this, which can be found here under the 'What can I bring to the viva' tab. Please note that any reasonable adjustments for D&N registered PGRs take precedence over this general guidance. The Code of Practice for Research Degree Students and Supervisors will be updated with this information in due course.

3. Annual reviews and supervisor logs

The [Supervisory meetings log](#) has been updated recently to capture the mode of supervision (online or in person). Colleagues are expected to check that enough supervisions per year are taking place in person during annual review and upgrade meetings.

4. The use of AI

Use of technology such as ChatGPT and other AI writing tools to generate work which is then submitted for assessment, without reference or permission, is likely to be deemed as commissioning. There is some debate about this terminology and it is under review, but for the current academic year it has been incorporate into the definition of 'commissioning' in the Regulations on Academic Misconduct Section 1 (2)(b).

The University has a working group that is looking into AI use and how we embed this into our curriculum. We will of course keep you informed if there are any recommendations that come out of this working group with regards to AI and academic integrity. The main consensus from discussions is that students must use this tool with integrity, and in accordance with any specific instructions given about its use in assessments.

- [Generative Artificial Intelligence at Royal Holloway](#)
- [Staff Guidance on identifying cases of Commissioning, including the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) writing tools](#)

5. PGR Space

The Doctoral School is aware that PGR space, both within departments and Schools, as well as general PGR specific space on campus is highly sought, and we have put together details of on campus facilities that PGRs can utilise in one place. This information has been disseminated to PGRs via the Researcher Newsletter, but do encourage and remind your students to make use of these spaces as needed. Further details can be found [here.](#)

6. Suspension of regulations (SoRs)

The Doctoral School has processed higher year on year suspension of regulation requests. Whilst this was expected during Covid, we find that as we have come out of Covid, the suspension of regulations requests remain at much higher levels than pre-Covid.

The suspension of regulations process supports severe unforeseen extenuating circumstances that may impact a PGR's ability to engage or progress with their research. The largest number of SoR requests received relate to extensions to deadlines (submission/upgrade/resubmission/corrections), and retrospective interruptions, and we are monitoring these requests in particular, and working with Schools to find mechanisms to reduce these numbers and find better ways to support PGRs through their journey in a timely manner.

SoR stats for 2022/23:

- **46/89** interruption requests processed last year were SoRs = **52%**
  (i.e. retrospective interruption/interruption in the writing up year/interruption over 24 months)
- **15/23** change in mode of study requests were SoRs = **65%**
  (i.e. change in mode after 24 months FTE studies/retrospective change in mode)
- **127** SoRs for extensions to deadlines, and other requests were processed
- **41** fast track Covid-19 extensions were processed
- **Total SoRs processed = 229**

Impact on PGR and Royal Holloway

Suspension of regulations can have a detrimental impact on PGRs including but not limited to:
- Incorrect/overpayment of stipends leading to requests for repayment – financial implications on PGR;
- Incorrect reporting of students to HESA where requests are retrospective;
- Incorrect reporting of students to UKVI where a PGR is on a student visa;
- Failures on JeS submission surveys for Royal Holloway departments for UKRI funder stipulated deadlines;
- Possible sanctions imposed on Royal Holloway by CDT/DTPs where submission deadlines are set by the terms of the funder, and these are not met;
- Incorrect reporting to the SLC for those in receipt of loans, leading to requests for repayment or deductions on future payments – financial implications on PGR;
- Additional charges to the PGR (i.e. extension fee);
- Overall negative impact on the student experience if there is no clarity on whether the student is engaging or not, and having access to any support services that may be required (Wellbeing, Disability & Neurodiversity, International Student Support, Money Advice, etc.)

You can find further guidance on the Suspension of regulations process [here](#).

7. Doctoral School Research Awards 2023/24

Many congratulations to the 26 postgraduate researchers who have been awarded a [Doctoral School Research Award](#) this year. The panel was impressed by the quality of the applications made and we are delighted that we have been able to fund 76% of the applications received.

[Find out what winning this award means to the recipients](#)

8. Outstanding Doctoral Supervisor of the Year Award 2023/24

This year's Outstanding Doctoral Supervisor of the Year Award competition has now closed and the name of the winner will be formally announced in due course. The successful candidate is currently working on their application for The Higher Education Awards.

9. PRES (Postgraduate Research Experience Survey) 2024

The Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) is a national survey of postgraduate researchers conducted by institutions across the UK and globally which allows the university to compare how we are doing with other institutions, to make changes that will improve what we do in future, and to keep doing the things that our postgraduate researchers value.

This year's survey was launched on 18 March and closed on 16 May 2024. We had a 44% response rate which is down on last year (49%). The analysis from PRES will be shared with departments once this is available.

10. Research Culture week

Save the date! The Festival of Research will take place from 10th–14th June 2024.

The Festival of Research will include a range of events, talks, roundtable discussions, and exhibitions to showcase the research done by colleagues and PGR research students. There will be training opportunities and discussions about growing our vibrant and collegial research culture, and events will be coordinated across the university including Schools, Departments, and Research Groups.

The Doctoral School will be hosting two events as follows, so please do pop along to support these if you can, and encourage your PGRs to attend as well:

PGR showcase event: Tuesday 11 June 10:00 – 13:00

Supervisor forum: (Theme – the use of AI in research) **Thursday 13 June 10:00 – 12:00**

11. CRM Recruit – the new Admissions system

As many of you will be aware, RHUL Direct has been replaced with a new Admissions platform – CRM Recruit.

If you have been granted access to the system, you can link to it from here.
Training materials and guidance can be found here. If prompted, the enrolment key to access the Moodle training course is **Founders!2**
An overview of the CRM Recruit system and training course can also be found here.
If you need access to CRM Recruit and have not been provided this as yet, please email the Admissions Systems team to request this.

12. Accessibility and Inclusion Hub

As part of the extension to the Royal Holloway EDI strategy to see equity and inclusion throughout the university community, an Accessibility and Inclusion Hub has been created as a central point of reference for EDI guidance for all academic and professional staff colleagues. You can access this suite of information via the following link: Accessibility and Inclusion Hub.

13. Access to wellbeing information for PGRs

You can find information on Wellbeing services available to PGR students:
- Wellbeing for PGRs – you can find support services you can signpost students to as well as wellbeing and self-care tips
- Support for PGR students registered with Disability and Neurodiversity Services (D&N) – this includes information on how to register with D&N, applying for Disabled Student's Allowance (DSA) or Library Support for disabled students. You can also find a range of annual review, upgrade and viva access arrangements that can be considered for your students.
    - Annual review and upgrade access arrangements – student guide
    - Annual review and upgrade access arrangements – staff guide
    - Viva access arrangements – student guide
    - Viva access arrangements – staff guide

14. Researcher Newsletter

Did you know that the Doctoral School sends out a fortnightly newsletter to all postgraduate researchers, providing news, articles and promotion of events specifically for our PGR community?

Have a browse of the latest editions of the Researcher Newsletter

If you would like to promote an event, or would like to provide some content, in this newsletter, please contact doctoralschool@rhul.ac.uk – ideally a week before the next edition. Similarly, if you would like to receive a copy of the newsletter yourself, so that you can see what your supervisees are receiving, please contact us at doctoralschool@rhul.ac.uk.

You can also add a news item and events via the Noticeboard directly here.

15. ON THE HORIZON:

2024/25 overhaul of regs
The Doctoral School will be working with the Academic Quality and Policy team to update the research degree regulations in 2024/25 to make these clearer to use. Academic input will be sought for any substantial changes.

PGR lifecycle
The Doctoral School will be working to create a user-friendly road map of the PGR lifecycle and plot possible interaction points at each stage with guidance to various courses of action available to best support different circumstances. The aim is to better support supervisors in their interactions with their PGRs with clear direction to relevant processes, forms and support services available.

16. Quick links

- [Quick link to PGR forms and guides](#)
- [A to Z of the Doctoral School microsite](#)
- [Turnaround times for Doctoral School processes](#)