

September 2010

Dear Student

## **INFORMATION FOR NEW RESEARCH DEGREE STUDENTS**

Welcome to the University of Westminster.

The information presented here is intended to help you get a picture of what being a research student at the University of Westminster entails. We hope you will find it useful. More detailed information can be found in the handbooks 'Regulations for the Award of the Degrees of Master of Philosophy and Doctor of Philosophy', 'Guidelines for Research Degree Students', 'Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes' and 'Essential Westminster: The Student Guide' as well as in the training sessions schedules for later in the year.

## **WHERE YOU BELONG**

The University is divided into 8 Schools (including WestminsterExchange). Each School has a Research Director who is responsible for the day-to-day management of the research activity in the School. As a research student, you belong to one of these Schools and you might also belong to a smaller research grouping or cluster within it. Each School also runs its own Induction Day and you will be required to attend this within the first few weeks of your time here.

For undergraduate and taught postgraduate students, the School Office is the main point of contact for administrative matters. However, generally speaking, your research degree registration at the University is administered centrally in the Research Office in the Academic Services Department, although there are also local administrators in some areas.

## **RESEARCH DEGREE STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY**

We would like to describe to you some of the initial aspects of your research degree studies, with which you will probably be unfamiliar.

### *Supervision*

You have decided to undertake a research degree here and will know that doing research is very different from taking a taught undergraduate or postgraduate course. Although you will be expected to attend lectures, seminars, workshops and other taught elements of the University Research Training Programme (URTP), your primary activity will involve conducting a programme of independent research under the guidance of your supervisors. Your principal supervisor is known as your Director of Studies and you will have one or sometimes two Second Supervisors.

If you haven't already done so, you should contact your supervisors as soon as possible after enrolment and arrange a supervisory meeting. One of the first tasks is to work with your Director of Studies to identify an appropriate programme of training and personal development in the context of the URTP.

The number and frequency of your meetings with your Director of Studies will vary over the course of your research but you should in most cases have no fewer than 6 meetings a year if you are full-time and 3 if you are part-time.

You are entitled to receive a total of 36 hours per year (for full-time students) or 24 hours per year (part-time students) of supervisory input, though in practice this annual entitlement is likely to be distributed across the entire registration period, in accordance with the varying

needs of the project at different times, as there will be times of both greater and lesser need of supervisory input. At least once a term there should normally be a meeting between you, your Director of Studies and the Second Supervisor. At this meeting, arrangements should be agreed to ensure your access between meetings to the supervisor(s) and advisers.

After each formal meeting with your supervisor(s), you should all agree and sign a written record of the meeting, known as a Research Supervision Log, blank versions of which are available on the Academic Services Department website and the Blackboard site.

These records help to monitor your progress and form part of the Annual Progress Review carried out by the School Research Directors.

## **FROM ENROLMENT TO SUBMISSION**

We would like to take you through the key stages of your time as a research student at the University.

### *Enrolment and Registration*

At this and other universities, the terms 'enrolment' and 'registration' are often used interchangeably, but it is important for you to understand the difference between them when applied to research degree studies.

All research students must enrol at the beginning of each academic year up to the time that you formally submit your thesis for examination. At enrolment, you pay any fees due and have your student ID card renewed which will enable you to continue using the University's facilities. You will also be asked to complete and hand in two monitoring forms, the Progress Survey and the Research Student Annual Questionnaire, in which you are asked to comment on all aspects of your research degree studies.

Registration follows initial enrolment. Just as any taught course has to go through a validation and approval procedure, your research degree registration has to be approved by the University's Research, Enterprise and Knowledge Transfer Committee (REKTC) (see the Guidelines: *Annexe A* Research Committee: Composition and Terms of Reference). The REKTC is empowered by the University's Academic Council to approve registrations, progression and examination arrangements and is made up of members of academic and other staff involved in research in a wide variety of disciplines.

Registration is an **academic** process, which allows the REKTC to satisfy itself that you are engaged on a viable topic of study from which a timely, successful degree completion is the likely outcome.

On the Academic Services Department website and on Blackboard, you will find a document 'Application to Register for a Research Degree'. If you are a **full-time** student, this form should be submitted to Mike Fisher, the Research Degrees Manager, in the Academic Services Department within the first four months of initial enrolment, and if you are **part-time**, within the first six months. It is advisable for you and your supervisors to start working on completing the form as soon as possible. The plan of work will be based on the proposal you submitted with your application for a place at the University, but following discussion with your supervisors, it is likely that you will wish to modify or fine-tune your original proposal.

The table overleaf shows the dates by which Applications to Register must be received in the Academic Services Department.

<b>Mode of Study</b>	<b>Enrolment date</b>	<b>Application to Register due in Academic Services Department</b>
Full-time	September/October 2010	1 February 2011
Part-time	September/October 2010	1 April 2011

Before submitting the completed form to Mike, please make sure that all the information has been provided and all the required signatures (your own, those of your supervisors, School Research Director and Dean of School) have been obtained. You will receive training on the Application to Register at University Training Day 2 (UT2).

*Approval of Registration process*

The process following submission of the Application to Register is as follows:

Your School Research Director will act as Rapporteur, unless s/he is one of your supervisors, in which case another member of academic staff will take on this role. The Rapporteur's brief will be to have an overview of your registration, making recommendations to the REKTC, notably on your Application to Register, Application to Transfer to PhD and Application for Approval of Examination Arrangements.

The Rapporteur suggests the name of an independent assessor, who will normally be a colleague from within the University, but is sometimes from outside the University. The name of the assessor will be made known to you and your supervisors, and their comments may be passed on to you, if appropriate. The assessor will also be on the panel for your Transfer Interview, which forms part of your Application to Transfer to PhD.

The Rapporteur will make a recommendation to the REKTC based on the assessor's report and their own reading of your application. If the recommendation is positive, then the application goes forward for REKTC approval. If the application is approved, Mike e-mails you and your supervisors to confirm this. The e-mail may also contain useful comments made during the assessment.

If it is the Rapporteur's view that the application should be referred back to you for further work or clarification, Mike will write to you and your supervisors to advise you of this and explain what needs to be done. Please remember that the comments made during the registration process are intended to help not hinder you, allowing identification of difficulties, which can then be put right at an early stage. You and your supervisors are free to respond to the comments as you see fit. Once the application has been re-submitted, it will be assessed again and the Rapporteur will make a further recommendation.

The whole approval procedure takes about two months, and during that time you should carry on with your research work. Any amendments suggested during the process can be incorporated later on.

## TIMESCALE

Let's have a look at how a successful **full-time** research student on the MPhil/PhD route might progress through his/her registration.

September 2010	MPhil/PhD enrolment for 2010/11
October 2010 onwards	Meetings with supervisors, drawing up training plan, preparing literature review etc and working on Application to Register
By 1 February 2011	Submission of Application to Register to the Academic Services Department
February – April 2011	Student continues working on research programme while Application to Register is in the assessment process
April 2011	Application to Register is approved by the REKTC (or not, as the case may be)
September 2011	MPhil/PhD enrolment for 2011/12
December 2011	Preparing to submit Application to Transfer from MPhil to PhD
February 2012	Transfer Interview takes place at School and Application to Transfer is endorsed by School Research Director
March 2012	Submission of Application to Transfer to the Academic Services Department
April 2012	Application to Transfer is approved by the REKTC (or not, as the case may be)
September 2012	PhD enrolment for 2012/13, if transfer has been approved
October 2012 – April 2013	Writing up and submitting draft chapters to supervisors for comment
July 2013 (or at least 3 months before the expected date of the viva)	Director of Studies submits Application for Approval of Examination Arrangements to the Academic Services Department
August 2013	Application for Approval of Examination Arrangements is approved by the REKTC
September 2013	Submission of thesis to the Academic Services Department
October 2013	Viva voce (oral defence of the thesis) takes place

For a successful **part-time** student on the MPhil/PhD route, the sequence of events may look like this:

September 2010	MPhil/PhD enrolment for 2010/11
October 2010 onwards	Meetings with supervisors, drawing up training plan, preparing literature review etc and working on Application to Register
By 1 April 2011	Submission of Application to Register to the Academic Services Department
April – June 2011	Student continues working on research programme while Application to Register is in the assessment process
June 2011	Application to Register is approved by the REKTC (or not, as the case may be)
September 2011	MPhil/PhD enrolment for 2011/12
September 2012	MPhil/PhD enrolment for 2012/13
September – December 2012	Preparing to submit Application to Transfer from MPhil to PhD
March 2013	Transfer Interview takes place at School and Application to Transfer is endorsed by School Research Director
April 2013	Submission of Application to Transfer to the Academic Services Department
May 2013	Application to Transfer is approved by the REKTC (or not, as the case may be)
September 2013	PhD enrolment for 2013/14, if transfer has been approved
October 2013 – September 2014	Student continues working on research and submitting draft chapters to supervisors for comment
September 2014	PhD enrolment for 2014/15
September 2015	PhD enrolment for 2015/16
October 2016 (or at least 3 months before the expected date of the viva)	Director of Studies submits Application for Approval of Examination Arrangements to the Academic Services Department
November 2016	Application for Approval of Examination Arrangements is approved by the REKTC
December 2016	Submission of thesis to the Academic Services Department
January 2017	Viva voce (oral defence of the thesis) takes place

**Note: The exact timings may vary from student to student, but these models should be adhered to as closely as possible.**

## COMMITTEES

Apart from the Research, Enterprise and Knowledge Transfer Committee (REKTC) mentioned above, there are two other committees with particular relevance to you as a research degree student here:

### *Research Ethics Sub-Committee*

The University's Research Ethics Sub-Committee receives applications for approval for research projects, including research degrees, in accordance with the University's *Code of Practice Governing Research, Investigations, Experiments and Demonstrations*: <http://www.wmin.ac.uk/page-14494>

All work undertaken in the University must conform with this Code of Practice, and for certain classes of work, you are required to obtain formal, specific Research Ethics Sub-Committee approval prior to commencing the project. It is your responsibility as an enrolled student of the University to ensure that the work you are undertaking complies with the Code, and that, where formal specific approval from the Research Ethics Sub-Committee is required; you obtain this prior to commencing the research.

### *Research Students' Forum*

The research student community is represented by the Research Students' Forum (RSF). The Forum operates through meetings of a Student Representatives' Panel (SRP), with representation for each School, together with relevant academic and support staff. The SRP considers formal business, such as consultations on proposed policy changes, consideration of annual monitoring material from the School Overview Reports, and the Student Feedback Questionnaire. The Forum also holds two open meetings annually, to which all research students, supervisors and School Research Directors are invited. These open meetings provide opportunities for networking with staff and other students and the collection of more broadly based feedback on the student experience. From time to time students may organise University-wide social events via the Forum.

Each School has a student representative on the Committee and it's a good idea to get in touch with him/her as soon as possible. Please contact the Secretary to the Committee for a list of the current representatives or alternatively go to Blackboard for details.

## CONTACT WITH THE RESEARCH TEAM

### *Change of circumstances*

It is important that you let us know of any change of circumstances that is likely to affect your research degree study. For example, you may wish to suspend your registration, in which case it is imperative that you and your supervisors complete the appropriate form and return it to us for consideration by the REKTC. Please also notify us of any change of address, telephone number, e-mail address, etc.

### *Official letters*

If you need an official letter as evidence that you are a student at the University (e.g. for the Council Tax Authorities, the Home Office, etc), you will need to contact the Research Team Secretary, Shila Panchasara. Please allow at least 7 working days for the letter to reach you.

### *General enquiries*

General advice and assistance (e.g. requests for forms etc) may be sought from Shila, as well. Alternatively, you can download the forms via the Academic Services Department website as well as the Blackboard site.

### *Appointments*

It is normally possible to make an appointment to see us if you give at least 48 hours' notice. We are based at Cavendish House, 101 New Cavendish Street (*see address below*). It is essential that you make an appointment, as we regret that we are unable to meet with students without an appointment.

We hope you have an enjoyable and productive year at the University.

Regards.

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