UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

THE ROLE OF THE
DIRECTOR OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Contents

1. Purpose and context

1.1 Purpose

This document provides a description of the key responsibilities and tasks of a Director of Graduate Studies. The role of the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) will of course vary from subject to subject, but to provide a comprehensive description, the document is written as if all of the faculty/department's responsibilities for graduate studies (other than examinations for postgraduate taught courses) have been delegated to a DGS. In practice, where a faculty/department also works via a Graduate Studies Committee, the DGS would of course bring many matters to that committee.

The descriptions are based on the tasks identified as the responsibility of the DGS, Graduate Studies Committee or responsible body in Education Committee's *Policy* documents for graduate studies. By setting out the scope of their responsibilities, this document aims to be particularly useful for DGSs who are new in post, and to be a reference document for existing DGSs.

The guidance is written on the basis that the DGS will have overall responsibility for PGT as well as PGR students in a faculty/department. Adjustments should be made where this is not the case, for example, where a Course Director undertakes these tasks for students on an individual course. This document does not cover responsibilities for PGT examinations, some of which may also be delegated to the DGS.

1.2 The Collegiate University's framework for graduate studies

At University level, the institutional oversight of policy, provision and standards for graduate studies is undertaken by the Education Committee and its sub-committees – the Graduate Panel, the University Skills Group and the Graduate Admissions Committee. On the college side, this role fulfilled by the Graduate Committee (Conference of Colleges). All subject areas are required to follow the *Examination Regulations* and the policies set out in the *Policy on Research Degrees* and *Policy and Guidance for Graduate Taught Courses*[1], unless a specific exemption or dispensation has been allowed.

Oversight is shared with the divisions. All four divisions have academic/teaching committees, and the Humanities, MPLS and Medical Sciences divisions each have a panel or sub-committee for graduate studies. Graduate matters are dealt together in one block on the termly agendas of the Social Sciences' Teaching Advisory Committee.

Education Committee's *Policy* makes it clear that it is essential that departments and faculties have in place a body and/or person responsible for ensuring that the procedures for graduate students at departmental or faculty level are followed appropriately and monitored regularly. The responsible body is typically a Graduate Studies Committee, but many of the day-to-day tasks are delegated to a Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) who normally chairs the Graduate Studies Committee.

1.3 Academic leadership, oversight, administration and advocacy

[1] http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/policiesandguidance/

The following sections identify three aspects of the DGS role.

1. Academic leadership – review, development and initiation of academic policy, procedures and provision for graduate studies in the faculty or department.

2. Oversight and administration – ensuring that the relevant procedures for graduate students are followed and monitored regularly, and that appropriate provision is made for graduate studies, in line with regulations, Education Committee policy, and divisional Codes of Practice for Supervision.

3. Advocacy – representing graduate matters to the relevant responsible body at faculty/department level; and representing the faculty/department's view to the relevant committees of the divisions, University and the colleges.

Education Committee stresses that the role of DGS should be seen as much as one of academic leadership as of academic administration. As far back as 1987, this understanding was encapsulated in a statement in the report of the committee of inquiry into the University's provision for graduate students:

> 'The Director of Graduate Studies should be identified clearly as the primary officer of the academic body with a continuing responsibility for graduate affairs. To him or her the academic body would normally look for the first formulation of its policy on graduate studies and for daily oversight of its graduate business.'

Many of the responsibilities of the DGS require academic judgement and experience of the difficult issues that a department and faculty might face, such as requests to change supervisor, problems with the academic progress of a student, and cases where the DGS decides that a student should not be admitted. Given the nature of these tasks, and given the policy role of the DGS, it is important that faculties and departments appoint an academic of appropriate standing within the faculty/department.

To ensure that the DGS is able to dedicate sufficient time to their oversight and policy roles, as well as their own research, Education Committee regards it as essential that departments and faculties provide the Director of Graduate Studies with sufficient support from an appropriately senior administrator(s). In smaller departments and faculties, it may be more appropriate for a DGS to share an administrator with another department or faculty. Many of the tasks listed in the subsequent sections will be undertaken by the relevant administrator, and only points of particular concern drawn to the attention of the DGS.

1.4 Appointment

Given the importance and complexity of the role of the DGS, it important that the arrangements for the appointment of the DGS provide continuity and stability. Education Committee strongly recommends that a Director of Graduate Studies should hold office for no less than two years and no more than four years in the first instance. The post should also be re-appointable. Consideration should be given to any ways to reduce the DGS's teaching load or other responsibilities.

It is also recommended that the DGS elect should attend the faculty/department's Graduate Studies Committee (or other body with responsibility for graduate matters) in the two terms before s/he takes office. Out-going DGSs should also make contact with the DGS elect in the term before appointment to provide appropriate induction and hand-over of responsibilities.

2. Admissions

2.1 Policy

In conjunction with colleagues, the DGS should formulate and keep under review the faculty/departmental policy and framework for:

a. admissions criteria, including the use of references, written work, entrance qualifications, interviews (where these are possible), and waivers to the University minimum English Language Requirements;[2]

b. policy for the admission of Recognised Students to the faculty or department.[3]

2.2 Oversight and Administration

The DGS should ensure that appropriate provision is made for admissions, in particular that:

a. information relating to postgraduate courses laid out in the course template[4] is clear, accurate and of sufficient detail to inform student choice;

b. admissions procedures are clear and consistently followed;

c. admissions criteria have been drawn up, including the use of references, written work, and interviews (where these are possible);

d. admissions decisions involve the judgement of more than one member of the academic staff with relevant experience and expertise;

e. admission offers make clear what the applicant must do: i) to take up the offer, ii) to request deferral of entry, or iii) if they fail to meet any conditions specified in the offer;

f. the maintenance of appropriate entrance qualifications and standards is monitored;

g. students are admitted only for whom appropriate supervision is available, and when willingness to supervise has been assured;

h. research students are admitted only when appropriate laboratory or bench space is available and research groups are not too large for adequate supervision;

i. those nominated as supervisors have sufficient experience/training and expertise to carry out their duties effectively

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[2] For English Language Requirements, see http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/applying-to-oxford/application-guide#content-tab--3. In addition, EPSC agreed in Michaelmas 2007 that applicants may be exempt from the language requirements where there is clear evidence that their previous education took place in an institution where the medium of instruction was English. A student who narrowly fails to meet the required standard may be admitted, subject to the department concerned paying for appropriate language sessions provided by the Language Centre. Approval for waivers rests with faculties and departments in consultation with the relevant division. The faculty/department is expected to monitor and track the number and outcome of any waivers and report these annually to the division for further report to EPSC. The faculty/department should also inform the student's college where a waiver had been agreed.

[3] For University policy on Recognised Students, see http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/new/recognised/

[4] Each PGR and PGT course should have an entry on the Graduate Admissions webpages using the template of provision provided by Graduate Admission.

j.   divisional, faculty or departmental norms and maxima for the number of research students allocated to individual supervisors are acknowledged when allocating students (these norms are enshrined in the divisional Codes of Practice for Supervision (see section 9);

k.   appropriate information is made available to candidates prior to accepting the offer of a place;

l.   prospective students are informed of any significant changes to a programme made between the offer of a place and the start of the course, and the options open to them in those circumstances;

m.   the University's English language requirements are met in full[5];

n.   appropriate attention is given, in the context of assessing applications, to relevant equal opportunities principles and legislation;

o.   where students are admitted with special needs, care is taken to ensure that an effective support structure is available.

p.   there is appropriate monitoring of the time taken to process admissions, and means are available to pursue any unnecessary delays [recognising any relevant circumstances affecting the operation of the admissions process at its various stages] and to respond in a timely fashion to complaints about the operation of the admissions process;

q.   information is available within the department/faculty about relevant sources of funding for graduate students, and procedures are in place for any applications for funding or studentships that require endorsement on behalf of the department or faculty.

The DGS should ensure that:

r.   an analysis of the faculty/department's graduate admissions round is undertaken, reviewed by the Graduate Studies Committee or equivalent, and reported to the division during Michaelmas term.

2.3 Advocacy

Following consultation with the faculty/department's Graduate or Academic Committee, the DGS should represent the faculty/department's perspective on divisional and institutional level graduate admissions policy and the allocation of scholarships to the appropriate divisional body and the Graduate Admissions Committee of the University's Education Committee.

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[5] http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/applying-to-oxford/application-guide#content-tab--3

3. Student funding

Policy

In conjunction with colleagues, the DGS should formulate and keep under review the faculty/departmental policy and framework for:

a. procedures for the selection of students for subject-specific scholarships and studentships, including any funding arrangements involving the faculty/department;

b. procedures for the distribution of other student funding determined by the faculty/department (e.g. travel bursaries).

Oversight and administration

The DGS should ensure that:

a. appropriate and transparent arrangements are in place student funding which is distributed by the faculty/department.

4. Induction of students

4.1 Policy

In conjunction with colleagues, the DGS should formulate and keep under review the faculty/departmental policy and framework for:

a. the induction tasks that are the responsibility of the individual supervisor and those which will be delivered by the faculty/department

b. the purpose and content of faculty/department-level induction days[6]

4.2 Oversight and Administration

The DGS should:

a. promote full understanding within the faculty/department of the procedures for the formal registration of research students both within the department/faculty and within the University, and ensure that appropriate returns are made to the University to allow a complete record of each year's intake to be made and maintained;

b. ensure that an appropriately qualified supervisor or supervisor(s) has been appointed for each student, and that appropriate substitute arrangements are made in the case of the supervisor's absence, illness or sabbatical leave; [7]

c. ensure that as soon as possible students know:

> - the name(s) of, and how to contact, the designated supervisor(s);
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> - how to contact the appropriate Director of Graduate Studies ;
>
> - the relative responsibilities of those involved in the supervision of the student's work; (especially where this involves joint supervision and/or any form of supervisory role for senior post-docs);
>
> - the name and role of the student's academic advisor in the department or faculty, where this appointment is made;
>
> - the appropriate channels for raising concerns and/or making a complaint.

d. ensure that all students receive appropriate information and induction material about their course e.g. handbook, notes of guidance, Code of Practice for Supervision, Brief Guide to Supervision, statement of provision;

e. ensure that research students receive appropriate information on the key milestones in their course and their timings (transfer, completion, submission, viva)

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[6] Under the existing University agreement, the division of week 0 for faculty/department and college induction is Monday and Tuesday 9-5 and Thursday 1-6 for faculties/departments and the remainder of the week for colleges.

[7] Each division/CE has a Code of Practice for supervision, and these outline the arrangements should be made to mentor new supervisors with no previous experience. Section 10 provides links to each of the Codes. The OLI provide seminars on supervising DPhil students (http://www.learning.ox.ac.uk/supervision/supervisor/new/)

f.   ensure that students understand the dangers of plagiarism and the consequent need for academic good practice[8];

g.   ensure students receive information about the online Graduate Supervision System and the sections which they should fill in;

h.   ensure that students know where to find out about:

- skills training available from the faculty/department, division and central University providers (e.g. IT Services, Language Centre, Careers Service);

- the Researcher Training Tool (WebLearn);

- training to teach and teaching opportunities.

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[8] The University's policies can be found at: http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/skills/plagiarism

5. Teaching, supervision and skills training

5.1 Policy and framework

In conjunction with colleagues, the DGS should formulate and keep under review the faculty/departmental policy and framework for:

a.   the structure of the faculty/department's portfolio of PGT and PGR courses (for example, the balance between PGT and PGR provision, the relationships between PGT course and subsequent PGR enrolment, the availability of staff for teaching and supervision);

b.   the implementation of the divisional or departmental Code of Practice for Supervision, including policies on the maximum number of students that should be supervised by an academic ('supervision norms'), the frequency of meetings between research students and their supervisor, departmental training/mentoring of supervisors who have not supervised before, and arrangements for co-supervision;

c.   the purpose of and framework for seminars for graduates

d.   the portfolio of research and transferable skills training which is appropriate for the faculty/department's students, and the provision that might be made by the faculty or department directly, or through other departments or service providers;

e.   existing and future plans for the allocation of faculty/departmental facilities specifically for graduate students, including laboratory provision (bench space), library provision, working space (which may include general library provision), access to appropriate computer facilities, and common room facilities.

5.2 Oversight and Administration

Supervision and relations between supervisors and students

The DGS should:

a.   encourage the timely completion of joint termly reports on progress by research students and their supervisors (other than in the term when the student submits his or her thesis) via the Graduate Supervision System (GSS). It is important that the DGS or other officer monitor the completion of reports, and pursue incomplete reports after an appropriate time. The DGS should make an annual report in Michaelmas term to the division on completion rates of supervision forms. There should be an agreed route within a department to chase up non-returned supervision reports. This should not depend solely on the DGS pursuing his or her colleagues.

b.   review all supervision reports and investigate any concerns that are likely to affect the progress of the student's research.

c.   identify means whereby support can be provided to the supervisor(s) where serious concerns about a student's ability or application to a research programme or satisfactory completion of a taught course have been raised;

d.   point to possible sources of support for a student who needs to be advised that desired academic standards have not yet been, or are unlikely to be, achieved. Sources of counselling and advice within the faculty/department and within the student's college should be clearly identified.

e.   be aware of the arrangements provided at all levels (department/faculty /division/university) for training for supervisors (especially new supervisors) and for continuing staff development in connection with all aspects of research supervision; and ensure that there is advice available for colleagues on training needs as appropriate.

If there is a breakdown in relations between a supervisor and a student, and it appears that a change in supervision is desirable, the responsible body or officer in conjunction (as necessary) with other academic staff (including college officers responsible for graduate students), should be able to advise in confidence, assist in resolving difficulties, and if necessary arrange the appointment of a replacement supervisor.

Skills

The DGS should:

- be aware of the transferable skills training on offer via the University (https://weblearn.ox.ac.uk/portal/hierarchy/page/researcher_trai) and the division;

- draw the attention of students and supervisors to what is available including online courses);

- make appropriate arrangements for the provision of training for graduate students at faculty or department level in research, teaching and transferable skills in consultation with the divisional skills training officer and CETL co-ordinator[9];

- oversee the effective use of training budgets, including allocations from Research Councils and the use of special tuition funding;

- monitor the quality and appropriateness of research and transferable skills training provided by the faculty or department

5.3 Advocacy

Following consultation with the faculty/department's Graduate or Academic Committee, the DGS should represent the faculty/department's perspective on divisional or University policy on supervision and teaching to the divisional academic committee and the Graduate Panel of the Education Committee. Oversight and review of termly reports may reveal issues of broader significance to the University as a whole.

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[9] The DGS should bear in mind any training offered at divisional level or by central University services (e.g. IT Services, the Language Centre, the Careers Service). See also https://weblearn.ox.ac.uk/portal/hierarchy/page/researcher_trai

6. Examination of research degrees

6.1 Policy

In conjunction with colleagues, the DGS should formulate and keep under review the faculty/departmental policy and framework for:

a.   requirements for transfer and confirmation;

b.   the criteria against which applications for transfer to doctoral status and confirmation are assessed;

c.   the appropriate expectations associated with examination for the degree of DPhil.

6.2 Oversight and Administration

Transfer of status

The DGS should ensure that the transfer procedure in a subject includes:

a.   criteria against which applications for transfer to doctoral status (or for the relevant lower degree) will be assessed;

b.   clear instructions about the materials required for the transfer application;

c.   clear instructions to assessors as to the nature of the required assessment process and of the assessment report;

d.   (for non-native English speakers) an indication of the assessors' view of the candidate's ability to present and defend the work in English;

e.   appropriate feed-back to the applicant, especially where an application has been unsuccessful , either from the supervisor, or in more difficult cases, from the DGS.

Confirmation of status

The DGS should ensure that the confirmation procedure in a subject includes:

f.   criteria against which applications for confirmation of doctoral status will be assessed;

g.   clear instructions about the materials required for the confirmation of status application;

h.   clear instructions to assessors as to the nature of the required assessment process and of the assessment report;

i.   (for non-native English speakers) an indication of the assessors' view of the candidate's ability to present and defend the work in English;

j.   appropriate feed-back to the applicant, especially where an application has been unsuccessful.

Examination

k.   Directors of Graduate Studies are likely to be involved in the approval of examiners for research degrees. This is a stage at which delays can occur, and, if one or both of the approved examiners declines to act, where these can be lengthy. It is important that the Director of Graduate Studies is aware of the procedures, and can intercede on the question of the time-scale for the examination with the new appointees. Such examiners will typically not understand how helpful it can be if they can move rather more quickly than might have been the case in the normal situation.

l.   Where examiners have enquiries about a proposed examination (beyond those of a routine nature that can be dealt with by the Graduate Studies Office), the *Policy on Research Degrees* stresses that these should be directed to the Director of Graduate Studies (and not to the supervisor).

m.   The DGS is required to report to the relevant divisional or other body any excessive delay that is brought to his or her attention in the examination of a candidate for a research degree. On receiving such a report the chairman or vice-chairman of the appropriate board/committee or the relevant Director of Graduate Studies may be empowered to investigate the reason for the delay and report to the board/committee.

n.   A candidate who wishes to enquire about the outcome of an examination before the examiners' report has been considered by or on behalf of the responsible body, is directed to the Director of Graduate Studies (with the explicit proviso that the director may decide to divulge nothing until the report has been formally considered by that body.)

o.   Where clarification is required from the examiners of any aspect of their report or recommendations, this may be sought on behalf of the relevant body by its chairman or vice-chairman or by the Director of Graduate Studies.

Approval of examination reports

p.   The responsible body or the DGS should approve DPhil examination reports at departmental level. Appropriate arrangements must be in place to deal with any cases of doubt or difficulty, or where it is inappropriate for the DGS to approve the report.

Exemptions and dispensations

q.   In some departments/faculties, the DGS may also be responsible for:

–   approving thesis titles or changes of title

–   approving applications for suspensions or extensions of time

–   approving applications to count vacation residence as a term

–   granting applications for late submission

–   granting applications for early viva

–   granting dispensation from residence requirements

Review and reporting

The DGS should ensure that:

r.   an analysis is undertaken annually of PGR progression, submission and completion rates in the faculty/department's. The analysis should be reviewed by the Graduate Studies Committee or equivalent, is reported to the division during Michaelmas term.

Information for students

The DGS should ensure that students receive the information and advice they need on:

s.   the purpose and processes for transfer, confirmation and the examination of research degrees;

t.   the University's regulations on publishing theses, particularly in electronic form[10].

6.3 Advocacy

Following consultation with the faculty/department's Graduate or Academic Committee, the DGS should represent the faculty/department's perspective on divisional or University regulations for research students, including regulations for transfer, confirmation, suspension and extension of time, and examination of research degrees.

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[10] For candidates admitted on or after October 2007, the Examination Regulations (2007, page 873) state that: 'Once the board has granted a candidate leave to supplicate, he or she must submit a finalized copy of the thesis, as approved by the examiners, to the Examination Schools for deposit in the relevant university library. The candidate must also submit an electronic copy to the Oxford Research Archive. (Candidates whose thesis has been prepared in non-standard media such as to make electronic submission impracticable may apply to the Proctors for exemption from this requirement.) (…) Candidates should note that leave to supplicate is conditional upon receipt by the Examination Schools of the library copy of their thesis and by the Oxford Research Archive of an electronic copy and that candidates may not proceed to take their degree until they have fulfilled the requirement to submit a library copy of the thesis and an electronic copy (except in cases where an exception to the requirement to submit an electronic copy of the thesis has been granted by the Proctors).'

7. Teaching by graduate students

7.1 Policy

The availability of opportunities for graduate research students to teach is important both professionally and personally. For those graduates seeking an academic career, it is widely perceived to be more difficult to get an academic position without teaching experience. On the other hand, there are limits to how much teaching we can offer graduate research students. We are committed to ensure that the majority of an individual undergraduate's education is delivered by an academic in an established post (a 'senior academic'). Teaching opportunities are also more limited for those PGR students following disciplines that are not taught at undergraduate level. The University and colleges also have a responsibility to ensure that graduates do not over-teach (and put the progress and completion of their own research work at risk), that teaching opportunities are allocated as fairly and transparently as possible, that graduate teachers are supported in their teaching, and that the quality of their teaching is assured. The University's explicit policy is that no graduate student should be allowed to teach without some form of initial training or induction.

In conjunction with colleagues, the DGS should formulate and keep under review the faculty/departmental policy and framework for:

a.   the maximum number of permitted hours per week[11] of tutorial/class teaching or demonstrating that a graduate student is allowed to deliver;

b.   criteria for entering graduate students on the department/faculty teaching register (e.g. the Preparation for Learning and Teaching at Oxford[12], having passed transfer of status), and the information contained on the register;

c.   the mentoring of any graduate students employed by the faculty/department to teach;

d.   ensuring that graduate students only undertake teaching after appropriate training;

e.   any faculty/department teaching assistantship schemes.

7.2 Oversight and Administration

The DGS should ensure that:

a.   appropriate arrangements are in place within the department/faculty for the registration of research students who wish to offer undergraduate teaching or demonstrating;

b.   that potential tutors/demonstrators recognise the limits on the number of hours for which they can teach/demonstrate and that such teaching/demonstrating should only be undertaken with the agreement of their supervisor(s);

c.   that potential tutors/demonstrators understand that they can only take on such work having undergone relevant training and preparation;

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[11] The University's expectation is that departments and faculties will follow the relevant research council guidelines: the majority of these stipulate that teaching should not exceed six hours per week, including preparation and marking

[12] http://www.learning.ox.ac.uk/support/teaching/programmes/

8. Feedback

8.1 Policy and framework

In conjunction with colleagues, the DGS should formulate and review the faculty/departmental policy and framework for:

a. consulting with graduate students and student representation on relevant decision-making bodies (for example, through Graduate Joint Consultative Committees or graduate members on JCCs);

b. receiving open and constructive feed-back from graduate students;

c. ensuring students are made aware of the faculty/departmental response to concerns raised by graduate students

8.2 Oversight and Administration

The DGS should ensure that:

a. a Graduate JCC (or its equivalent) is in place and contributes to the development and monitoring of provision for graduate students; or

b. alternative means are in place to establish a regular mechanism for open and constructive feedback for research students;

c. opportunities are in place for consultation and representation on relevant decision making bodies

9. Complaints and appeals

Oversight and Administration

The DGS should ensure that complaints and appeals procedures are in place, and that information is available within the department/faculty relating to procedures for making complaints and appeals. An annual report on the number and nature of complaints and appeals should be made to the division in Michaelmas term.

10. Key documents

Internal

The University's regulations, policy and guidance for graduate studies are set out in:

- the *Examination Regulations*: this includes all the governing regulations relating to the admission, transfer and confirmation of status, and examination of research degree students

  (http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/examregs/);

- Education Committee's *Policy Research Degrees*: this brings together all relevant regulations as well as examples of good practice

  (http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/policiesandguidance/);

- Education Committee's *Policy and Guidance for Graduate Taught Courses*: this brings together all relevant regulations as well as examples of good practice

  (http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/policiesandguidance/).

The DGS should also ensure s/he is familiar with the division's Code of Practice for Supervision: http://www.learning.ox.ac.uk/supervision/supervisor/new/

The results of annual institutional-level surveys with students can be found through the Education Policy Support Section portal: http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/epsc/

External

The Quality Assurance Agency's *UK Quality Code for Higher Education* provides guidance on maintaining quality and standards for universities and colleges subscribing to the agency. The Code has a specific section on the quality assurance of research degrees:

http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/quality-code-part-b

For a broader view of national and international developments in graduate education, the following websites and publications may be of interest:

- Vitae: http://www.vitae.ac.uk/

- LERU (2007) Doctoral studies in Europe: excellence in researcher training, League of European Research Universities – http://www.leru.org/?cGFnZT00

- For STEM subjects: The Royal Society (2007) A higher degree of concern http://royalsociety.org/document.asp?latest=1&id=7403

11. Calendar of key events

Michaelmas

Induction events: By University agreement, the division of week 0 for faculty/department and college induction is as follows:

	9am - 1pm	**1pm - 5pm**	**5pm onwards**
Monday	Dept/Fac	Dept/Fac	College
Tuesday	Dept/Fac	Dept/Fac	Dept/Fac
Wednesday	College	College	College
Thursday	College	Dept/Fac (intil 6pm)	College
Friday	Dept/Fac	College	College

Review previous Graduate Admissions round: Consider number and quality of applications, withdrawals and take-up of places; availability of awards and other funding; procedures for the forthcoming admissions round; review graduate admissions criteria. Write summary report to division on these items.

Annual review of PGR progression, submission and completion rates: Any trends or developments arising out of DPhil examining and reports; effectiveness of procedures for transfer and confirmation of status. Ensure summary report to division on these items.

Annual review of return-rates for termly supervision report forms. Ensure report to Division.

Identification of new course proposals for introduction in future years: PGT courses – preliminary steps for new courses to be introduced two full academic years ahead, final steps for courses to be introduced in MT one full academic year ahead.

Consider internal and external examiners reports for PGT courses. Forward reports and committee comments to division.

Annual report to division on the number and nature of complaints and appeals.

Hilary

Send any agreed changes in the *Examination Regulations* for the following academic year to division and (for major changes only) to Education Committee (via Education Policy Support Section).

Review and update statements of provision in time for updated Graduate Admissions Site

Trinity

Review departmental/faculty provision of transferable skills training and preparation for academic practice (CETL) for research students and postdoctoral researchers, and programme for coming year.

Long Vacation

Review and update programme specifications, and submit updated documents to Divisions

Review and update course handbooks and website material for students.

12. Key areas of concern for students

As noted in section 8, the DGS must deal with complaints made by students which relate to teaching or other provision made by the faculty/department, examination of research degrees and transfer or confirmation of status. However, these complaints are not necessarily representative of the broader areas of concern of the majority of graduate students.

When reviewing policy, it may be helpful for DGSs to have information on the concerns of the wider cohort of graduate students. Alongside faculty/departmental feedback mechanisms, annual institution-wide surveys provide one route for identifying the key concerns of the broad population of graduate students, and results can be found on the portal of the Education Policy Support Section (http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/epsc/). Separate surveys are undertaken regularly of PGR and PGT students, though response rates are relatively low at around 20%, and so dissemination is limited. An annual survey of international students is also undertaken, and provides a split of the results for international PGT and PGR students. It achieves a response rate of around 40% for international PGR students and 23% for PGT students. Nonetheless, DGSs may be interested in the overall findings even when response rates are low.

Supervision and teaching

What the surveys do show is that graduate students rate the standard of supervision at Oxford very highly. For example, in the 2008 survey of PGR students, 56% of all respondents agreed that their supervision is better than they expected, and a further 12% said that it had met expectations.

Compared to PGR students, our PGT students are less enthusiastic about the quality of education than might be hoped. For example, in the 2005 and 2006 surveys, around 40-50% of students agreed that 'My teachers made a real effort to understand any difficulties I had.' PGT students can also be critical of the amount of feedback they receive. Only around a third of the PGT respondents in the 2005 and 2007 surveys agreed that 'My teachers put a lot of time into comments (orally and/or in writing) on my work'. A significant proportion of PGT students are also unclear of what is expected of them and where they are going on their course, underlining the importance of induction. For example, just over a third of PGT respondents in the 2005 and 2006 survey s agreed that 'It was often hard to discover what was expected of me on this course'

Intellectual and social climate

Research students are largely positive about the opportunities for social interaction with other PGR students offered by colleges. However, they are more negative on questions relating to their sense of belonging to an intellectual or research community in both colleges and faculties/departments, and negative about the opportunities or social interaction with other PGR students offered by faculties/departments. In the 2005 and 2006 surveys of PGR students, around 25% of students agreed that 'I tend to feel isolated within this department/faculty', and around 20% neither agreed or disagreed. In the 2008 survey of PGR students, only 45% agreed that 'I feel integrated into my department's community.'

Teaching opportunities

Whilst graduate students need to be proactive in finding graduate teaching opportunities, some feel that the system is too ad hoc and not systematic enough.

There are a number of aspects to this.

- The PGR survey suggests that it can be difficult to find out about opportunities to teach – only 39% of respondents agreed that 'It is clear to me how to find out about opportunities for me to teach at Oxford.'

- Comments from a significant number of students in the PGR (and International Student surveys) show that many graduate research students hold the view that opportunities to teach are based on personal contacts rather than a system which awards teaching opportunities to those who can demonstrate their experience or qualification to do so

- There is also a perception amongst some, whether fair or not, that the system for allocating teaching opportunities favours those students who did their undergraduate degree at Oxford and students in mixed rather than graduate-only colleges

Skills training

In the 2008 survey of PGR students, 64% agreed that there are adequate opportunities for them to further develop their research skills. Around two thirds of Oxford respondents agreed that developing transferable skills is an important part of their research degree, though only 55% were satisfied with the opportunities available to develop such skills. There is considerable variation by division. Satisfaction is generally higher in the sciences.

Equipment, workspace and IT facilities

Just over 80% of respondents in the 2008 PGR survey agreed that the University's facilities met or exceeded their expectations. Libraries receive the highest score. The weakest area is working space, particularly in the Humanities. Oxford does noticeably better than other universities in student surveys on he quality of libraries and equipment.

Admissions

Oxford graduate students and graduate students in 13 other Russell Group universities were asked about the admissions process. in the Michaelmas 2007 International Student Barometer Survey. It is noticeable that Oxford students who were admitted had to wait longer on average for a final decision on their admission than other Russell Group graduate students.

How long did you wait from application to offer?

	Oxford	Russell Group
	Average number of days	
PGT	65	47
PGR	71	61

Students in the International Student Barometer Survey were also asked to comment on the communications about admissions between them and the University and Colleges. A large number of comments referred to the delays in the processing of applications and long periods of time of hearing nothing.

13. Sources of advice for the DGS

For **general points related to graduate admissions**, nadia.pollini@admin.ox.ac.uk   / tel. 70051

For **University academic policy** and strategy matters, the Head of Education Policy Support (secretariat to the Education Committee), richard.hughes@admin.ox.ac.uk / tel. 80295

For **divisional/Continuing Education** matters:

http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/graduate/contacts

The **OUSU** Graduate Affairs section can be contacted via: graduates@ousu.org

For **safety** matters, see www.admin.ox.ac.uk/safety