

**The University of Edinburgh**  
**The Moray House School of Education**  
**School Postgraduate Studies Committee**

**12 March 2014**

**Research Courses Update**

Brief description of the paper

The paper is self explanatory

Action requested

For consideration, discussion and ongoing action.

Resource implications

Does the paper have resource implications? Yes

If 'Yes', in which section(s) of the paper are they described?

The issues covered in the paper highlight the financial implications of decisions made at the committee.

Risk assessment

Does the paper include a risk analysis? No

If 'Yes', in which section(s) of the paper is it set out?

Equality and diversity

Does the paper have equality and diversity implications? No – although there are equality implications as noted in the paper.

If 'Yes', in which section(s) of the paper are they described?

Freedom of information

Can this paper be included in open business? Yes

If no, please indicate why the paper must be withheld, and for how long (eg until decision is publicly announced):

Its disclosure would substantially prejudice a programme of research		Its disclosure would substantially prejudice the effective conduct of public affairs	
Its disclosure would substantially prejudice the commercial interests of any person or organisation		Its disclosure would constitute a breach of confidence actionable in court	

Its disclosure would constitute a breach of the Data Protection Act		Other (please give further details)	
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Any other relevant information

Originator of the paper

**Pete Allison, Mairin Hennebry, Rory Ewins  
27 February 2014**

## PG Level 11 Research Courses Review Update Note 2014

Following our useful discussion regarding the PG research courses review on 18<sup>th</sup> November there have been a number of further discussions regarding research courses. This note summarises the current situation and thoughts for information and concludes with suggestions for SPGSC.

At the above meeting of programme directors, Director of QA, DHol and those involved in Course teaching and organising it was agreed that broadly speaking the three courses served their purpose. More specifically it was agreed that some of the content of SoK and CR needed some minor changes and developments but that these would be subject to further discussions. It was also agreed that the challenge for the third course of dovetailing and timing with the dissertation and the 10+50 model should be reviewed. One possible solution to this is to stretch the current 10 credit course content out from mid February to July and make it 'non credit bearing' but keep the agreement for staff time for the course. This would allow the learning opportunities to be offered at times that are closer to 'point of need' (eg sessions on data analysis in July) without the challenges of the assessment. Such an approach would mean moving the dissertation to 60 credits but maintain the benefits of drawing on school wide skills to offer input focused on the development of research skills.

Broader issues inevitably arose which are summarised below.

The assumption for all of the below is that each student should count equally regardless of country of origin, fees paid etc. which we understand / believe to be reasonably uncontroversial. While we can review the current generic research courses and the ways in which we best meet the needs of the students from the programmes that are taking the courses there are two broader issues that we believe need attention.

### Resources and Equality

The courses are taken by students on some programmes but other programmes have opted out of them. For some programmes we consider there to be a clear and strong rationale for this (eg Strength and Conditioning) but for other programmes the rationales offered would also apply to almost all other programmes (e.g. the students learn best when the issues are contextualised in the substantive literature – the substantive literature argument). An obvious exception to this are the on-line programmes which could presumably benefit from a similar 'shared approach' among all on line programmes in the school. Whether this contextualised argument is 'true' or not is irrelevant here but what we believe matters is the influence this has on *inequality* across the school. If we reject the 'substantive literature' argument, and similar, then almost all programmes should be taking these courses. If we

accept the argument then logic suggests that (all?) programmes run their own courses (a luxury that the current landscape is unlikely to support financially).

The matter of inequality is exemplified by several new programmes which have recently been validated which have their own research courses. Students on these programme specific research courses will probably be taught in groups of 10-15 and enjoy 15 or 25 hours of contact time (depending on credits). In the meantime other students have the blended learning experience which, evidence clearly indicates, is appropriate for meeting students needs at that stage in their studies (difficulty, intro to reading research in groups of 25+ with 7.5 hours contact time and 5 hours of on line videos etc) but is not the same face to face contact time which many students would like but we do not offer (for practical - staffing and time - reasons). The point here is not about the course content per se but about the learning experiences and associated inequality. The inequality that this issue highlights across the school is significant and discomfoting.

A further related point here is that while some larger programmes might argue that they are 'big enough' to have their own research courses and that this is an 'efficient' way to proceed the 'cost' of such an approach is that smaller programmes are either left looking costly (when we may want to run them out of principle) and/or that we return to a very programme specific way of thinking which is not the current 'direction of movement'. Such an approach may also have risks when student numbers fluctuate – courses shrink and others grow. This issue seems to be primarily concerned with the units of costings and how this is approached in the school.

### **Substantive Course Content**

We initially set out to review the three generic courses but in doing so have inevitably been drawn into broader considerations before we believe we can review the courses in the context of the wider school PGT provision and the future / vision for this aspect of the School. We had intended to review the three generic courses and as such have a 'natural' steering group involving the relevant programme directors (or representatives) and those involved in the courses. However, the above point suggests that a wider discussion is needed which we believe needs to be at a more strategic level and highlights the constraints within which we need to work.

To summarise, there are two issues outlined above. First, the resources and equality of student experience and second, the content of courses – what do we want / need students to learn. There is only limited discussion of the second point and the first point is the main issue for discussion. A third point does arise which is much more logistical which is concerned with staffing for the courses.

Our own sense from numerous discussions is that we should be looking for efficiencies and equalities at this time and as such looking at ways of (a) including as many programmes in generic courses (which could then enable different instances to be offered and associated

flexibility); (b) ways of identifying significant inequalities in student experiences and; (c) ensuring that such courses are staffed reliably from experienced and suitably qualified staff and not relying on a 'last minute buy in' approach, and (d) increasing understanding within the school that staffing needs to be proportional to students from institutes.

There are a host of different ways to proceed. One approach is to move to programme level courses which would take us full circle and have staffing implications. We believe this would be a luxury approach but also high risk given the current viability pressures. In essence this would make many (perhaps all) programmes even less viable.

We believe that there should be three groups of research courses (all subject to viability review):

- (a) The current generic suite (which may be adjusted over the coming 12 months)
- (b) The on line courses that are available for digital education but will soon incorporate Sports Coaching and Performance and could incorporate Social Justice and Community Practice (although the programme director wants a bespoke course). All other on line programmes could join these courses.
- (c) Courses for research masters – Educational Research and International Child protection Research and possibly some future programmes depending on their focus.

In addition we believe that Strength and Conditioning (and Physical Activity for Health?) should continue with their current science research course which is very different to other possibilities in substantive content. Developing a structure of research courses as above would be in line with the last QQR (now PPR) and would offer both efficiencies and help to address the inequality issues mentioned above. The courses would also offer a range of options for doctoral students to audit which is commonly requested.

Clearly there is a collection of assumptions above and a whole host of issues that might be useful to 'unpack' further but we want to raise these issues so that we proceed in a manner which is carefully considered and so that the review of the courses is productive and has a clear direction.

We are therefore seeking comments from SPGSC on the following issues:

1. The changes to the structure of the three generic research courses outlined at the start of this paper. More specifically moving the 10+50 to 60 and moving the ongoing content of the Planning Research course to be 'stretched out'. If this structure is agreeable then we would work on 'fleshing out' more specifics.
2. Discussion on strategic directions for research courses across the PGT provision and how we might proceed on the basis of the advice from the last QQR and the current landscape of the school and HE more generally.

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27 February 2014

