

The University of Edinburgh

The Moray House School of Education

School Postgraduate Studies Committee

Tuesday 9th February 2016

MSc(R) Short Life Working Group: Report

Brief description of the paper

Brief report from the Short-Life Working Group to review the current School position in terms of Masters by Research, in light of a 2015-16 change in University policy

Action requested

For information and discussion. The required action will be to at least update the current Education (MSc by Research) programme (PRMSCEDUCD2F) to conform to the new policy. However, the SLWG would prefer the development of a new School-wide MSc(R) programme that would be promoted and recruited to, rather than just an exit route from other PGR programmes. The rationale is presented in the attached paper.

Does the paper have resource implications? Yes

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

The attached paper highlights the likely requirements according to the different options that are available for discussion at this point.

Risk assessment

Does the paper include a risk analysis?

No (not appropriate until SPGSC has discussed the report)

Equality and diversity

Have due considerations been given to the equality impact of this paper?

Yes, we have considered access to PGR programmes for individuals who may not be able to access longer PGR programmes

Freedom of information

Can this paper be included in open business? Yes

Any other relevant information

Tony Turner will attend the meeting to discuss the paper and field comments. SPGSC members are asked to consider the paper in the context of a short report from a requested SLWG, and therefore an item for discussion rather than a request for approval.

Originator of the paper

Tony Turner (04/02/2016) – on behalf of the SLWG (Cristina Iannelli, John Telford, Stelios Psycharakis, Shaun Phillips, Ellen Boren, Debi Fry)

CURRENT CONTEXT

A programme called Education (MSc by Research) currently exists in the School (PRMSCEDUCD2F). It is primarily used as an alternative exit route for students transferring from other PGR programmes, with no advertising or active recruitment. Although it has been used on specific occasions when requested (only a few students in the last 10 years). The programme is assessed by a 30,000 word dissertation (a single 180-credit Level 11 course in the DPT – REDU11043 Dissertation (MSc by Research) Education). Assessment is by 1 internal and 1 external examiner, with no compulsory oral examination. Fees (FT) are currently £6600 for UK/EU or £16,500 for international students (for 16/17 these will be £7,000 and £17,400 respectively).

However, the University introduced a new policy in September 2015, in order to streamline and ensure consistency across the very many Masters by Research courses previously on offer across the University. This policy can be found at: http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/AcademicServices/Staff/Curriculum/MScByResearch_Structure.pdf, although the key points are added as a further appendix below.

The existing programme does not conform to this policy, so a SLWG was set-up to review the policy and make a report to SPGSC on the implications of the policy and options available regarding Masters by Research in the School. This SLWG met twice and conducted a review of some of the equivalent programmes available in the UK in Education and Sport (representatives from each Institute). The SLWG recognised 3 options available, the latter being the preferred option, although it is for SPGSC to consider this.

OPTION 1 – No Masters by Research

- A. Close the existing course and programme, which would have no resource implication and would be one less programme on the books.
- B. The main risk is that we would no longer have a Masters by Research exit route from other PGR programmes (eg failed progression or change in circumstances).
- C. We may also be missing an opportunity in at least some subject areas.

OPTION 2 – Do the minimum (adapt existing programme to MSc (R) policy)

- D. Change the name of the current programme and ensure assessment criteria fit with policy.
- E. Minimal resource implication – there would need to be a designated PD but we wouldn't actively recruit to the programme unless specifically requested on a case-by-case basis.
- F. No compulsory taught elements, with options for student to audit research methods courses that already exist in the School.
- G. Retains the exit route from other PGR programmes.

OPTION 3 – Write a new MSc (R) programme that is made available

- H. Develop a School-wide MSc (R) programme that would have named pathways linked to the 5 School RKE clusters (or Institutes), in line with RKE strategy. The programme would be available as an exit route, but also as an entry point. It would not be promoted extensively like PhD, with expectations of only small numbers of students each year.

- I. Due to resource implications, it would only work with a single PD (could it be included with other PGR programmes?), although College have highlighted other schools where each research area has a designated subject-advisor that interested candidates can contact (no resource implication) for advice on the specific research cluster.
- J. Application would be similar to PhD (shorter proposal) following discussion with an agreed supervisor, topics must also align with a named research group.
- K. Supervision would be a clear resource implication (would need to at least be equivalent to PhD?). Assessment cost also minimal (1 internal and 1 external with no viva).
- L. Research Methods (RM) training is the area that we had the longest discussions about and this potentially has resource implications. The new policy is extremely flexible in this regard – no requirement for any taught courses. However, the SLWG were of the opinion that at least 20-credits of RM should be passed as a guideline (there can't be a progression element according to the policy). This could be from existing School-wide courses within specific clusters, or ideally via blended/online delivery, so that they could feature at a single entry point in October. As some applicants may view the MSc(R) as a pathway to PhD (1 + 3 model) then they may want/require some credits awarded for RM.
- M. Further options could be available for auditing where further training is recommended.
- N. Assessment would be at least 160-credits of dissertation at level 11, with pass/fail boundary at 50%.
- O. Based on the review of the SLWG there are comparative programmes available in Scotland and the rest of the UK. There wasn't much in the area of Outdoor Education and many of the Education versions were primarily taught programmes, like our own MSc Educational Research, although there were also more research-based programmes. In Sport there are similarly some taught programmes as well as some research-based ones. The initial review highlighted that, as with our PGT programmes, the current non-negotiable fee for MSc(R) is very expensive.
- P. The main risk is if no students are recruited, but there is limited resource implication of this. Ensuring agreement with a potential supervisor would counter the unlikely event of potential over-recruitment in a specific area.
- Q. However, in some areas (eg performance sport), there is some perception that the PhD model is not sustainable in this field and MSc (R) would be much more relevant and supportable. Professional development in this context does not often relate to PhD. Resources and personnel fluctuate on an at least annual basis in this environment, so funding for at least 3 years can rarely be agreed, and nor can access to participant groups. In the Human Performance Science group the existing programme has been successfully adopted several times, but the title is not an attraction at present. Other research groups in ISPEHS are also interested in MSc(R) as an available option as it could suited to engagement with the local and national community.



MSc by Research Structure

THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH

Comes into effect in academic year 2015/16

- 1.1 The MSc(R) is a research degree and therefore the majority of the 180 credits should be attributable to research content. The degree is consistent with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (www.scqf.org.uk): 150 of the 180 credits are at level 11. The research element will be worth a minimum of 120 credits of which a minimum of 60 must be attributable to the dissertation or to a portfolio of artifacts, artworks and other practice-based outputs (a portfolio). This structure continues to allow for flexibility within the degree including, for example, the dissertation or portfolio being worth 180 credits, a 60:60:60 split between taught courses, research training/practice and the dissertation/portfolio and also enabling opportunity for other formats provided that the structure adheres to the criteria of 120 of the 180 credits available being allocated to the research content.
- 1.2 The order of taught and research activity within the programme is not prescribed.
- 2.1 The assessment of the dissertation or portfolio must be passed at a minimum of 50%. Failure to achieve this standard in the dissertation or portfolio will automatically result in no award at MSc level being made.
- 2.2 The overall assessment weighting will be in line with the credit weightings.
- 2.3 There will be no progression hurdle to proceed to the dissertation or portfolio.
3. Students who are ineligible to be considered for the award of the MSc(R) will be considered for a lesser award such as a general certificate or taught diploma depending on the credits they have accumulated while on programme. [The 2015/16 postgraduate degree regulations will outline possible exit awards.]
4. The manner in which the dissertation or portfolio will be examined will be determined by the Board of Examiners. It may be examined by the Board and/or may have Examiner(s) appointed for the research elements. The Examiner forms will be streamlined against agreed criteria.
5. There will be an implementation period agreed during which all Masters by Research programmes will migrate to the new regulations and all will be required to have a Degree Programme Table.
6. Only the MSc(R) will be awarded and any other research masters degrees (e.g. MRes) will migrate to the new framework.
7. All MSc(R) programmes will be expected to meet the new regulatory framework in 2015/16.

9 October 2014