School of Earth and Environment
Faculty of Environment

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Postgraduate Researcher (PGR) Workspace/Accommodation Policy

Summary

The School of Earth and Environment (SEE) has seen a growth in PGR registrations of over 30% in the last 5 years (since 2009). SEE is now one of the biggest Schools on campus with regard to its PGR cohort. Nonetheless, it is one of the School's strategic goals to continue PGR growth in line with University strategy. Our PGRs are an important part of the School and their research a very valuable addition to the School's overall research output. We aim to support our PGRs at all stages of their candidature. To allow this and to improve the management of PGR space allocation across the school in line with the wishes of the research institutes we guarantee space provision for PGRs along the lines described in this document. The changes to current practice are only affecting postgraduate researchers in their overtime period (ie, beyond their standard period of study).

Background

PGR admissions can be quite erratic with researchers arriving late due to funding uncertainties, visa issues, or last minute pre-registration withdrawals. These circumstances make space planning for PGRs extremely challenging. This document outlines a strategy of how to achieve more planning certainty regarding space issues both for the SEE buildings facilities/planning team and the PGRs themselves, whilst continuing to deliver an excellent PGR experience.

Some of the issues regarding PGR work space that this policy proposal attempts to remediate are outlined below:

- The continuing growth in PGR numbers as part of the strategic plan for both the School and the University is creating pressure on already full multi-occupancy spaces.
- Due to the nature of research degree study, PGRs submission deadlines often change, and suspensions and extensions to the maximum time limit (MTL) of study are fairly common. This leads to high uncertainty in terms of strategic PGR space planning and might lead to unnecessary pressure on already stressed PGRs close to their submission date, diminishing the positive PGR experience. There is currently no working mechanism for vacating PGR desks in the School.
- The examination outcome often results in a correction time of up to 12 weeks and occasionally results in a referral (of up to 18 months). The examination outcome obviously cannot be anticipated.
- The School's preference for locating PGRs in Institute-facing space, compounds the allocation problems, as there is no consistency of occupation (ie, some Institutes have space whilst others are overcrowded).
- As PGRs approach their expected end dates (and the corrections period) quite often seats are left unoccupied in Institute-facing space which would be more suitable for PGRs in the earlier stages of their study, since the PGRs close to finishing their study often choose to work in quieter environments (eg, the library or at home).

This proposal provides PGRs with a smaller write-up opportunity towards the end of their candidature whilst still trying to place PGRs close to their home Institutes at the beginning of their candidature. It is

hoped that this policy will be beneficial for PGRs at different stages of their study and will also have a positive effect on thesis submission rates.

PhDs are, by far, the most common research degree in our School and despite the 3-year project length at the University of Leeds only a very small percentage of PhDs are submitted within 3 years. We traditionally see most submissions at between 42 and 48 months of the maximum time limit (MTL). We therefore try to accommodate PGRs during that critical time in the overtime period (36 to 48 months).

We plan to allocate space depending on the following deadlines:

0 – 42 months PGRs housed in Institute-facing space, whenever possible. It might be necessary to move individual PGRs during this time after consultation.

42 – 48 months PGRs are moved to a newly formed cross-institute 'Writing-Up' space. Proximity to Institute hubs is not a priority for these well-established PGRs and they will likely benefit from a quieter working environment. A proposed location could be Level 8 of the SCR refurbished space. This write-up area will be a combination of fixed-seating and hot-desk space designed to accommodate PGRs at all write-up stages, including leading up to thesis submission and also those undertaking thesis corrections following their vivas. Computer hardware will include Linux and Windows computers. Depending on the PGRs' working preferences, they would be able to choose either an assigned desk or hot-desking.

PGRs planning to submit very close to the 42 month deadline should also have an opportunity to request to remain in their current location to avoid disruption.

MTL + 16 weeks We plan to provide PGRs with a permanent working space for up to 16 weeks after their MTL to accommodate them during the examination period. This takes into account up to 4 weeks between thesis submission and the viva and then up to 12 weeks of thesis corrections following the viva.

Referrals The small number of PGRs who are referred will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis, involving discussion with the PGR and supervisor, since typically these referred PGRs will no longer be working within the School. These candidates, at a minimum, will be provided with hot-desking space

Extensions or suspensions to MTLs will be taken into account, when considering the point of when to move PGRs. The necessary information will be collected through Banner which accurately reflects the MTL. PGRs in the write-up space should be able to choose between hot-desking (if they are planning to be mainly absent during the write-up time) or allocated desk space (if they are still working closely within the Institute). If a PGR continues employment within the School as a PDRA it is expected that they will vacate the writing-up space and will move to an appropriate PDRA space within the Research Institute.

This policy will allow a quieter working environment for finishing PGRs than the multi-occupancy offices. It will allow a more efficient use of the existing PGR space and will allow more accurate data on space allocation and planning allowing strategic PGR development.