The Research Student Environment

Southampton Solent University endeavours to provide a research environment which supports research students in doing and learning about research, in a setting where externally respected research takes place.

This document outlines the ways in which the University provides an appropriate environment to support all research students to learn about and undertake research, and which encourages research achievement. It provides a statement of how the University interprets and meets the requirements of the UK Quality Code B11 indicator 4.

Solent’s research student environment
The University is committed to social justice and this is reflected in its approach to research and the support it provides for its range of research students. The University encompasses a rich array of research of applied and multi-disciplinary research. Research students, researchers and practitioners operate at the leading edge of their disciplines and enjoy connecting through the research and innovation hubs, thus forming communities of practice. Research students are encouraged to engage with the most appropriate research and innovation hub as an important aspect of their development into early career researchers and as active members of the research community.

The University recognises that given the relatively small yet growing size of the research student community and its very diverse nature, creating a sense of community and providing an environment for doing and learning about research is challenging. The University is committed to an on-going portfolio of enhancement activities building on sector good practice models and promoting the engagement of students and staff in the continued development of a vibrant community in which to support student research. The postgraduate research website can be accessed at http://www.solent.ac.uk/research/postgraduate-research/postgraduate-research.aspx

The increasingly applied nature of the doctorate and the strong competition in the job market has led to a transformation of the doctorate and the needs of doctoral students. Indeed, the doctoral journey is also now very much about self-realisation and improving the self. Therefore, the University is keen to offer support, both centrally and from within the research and innovation hubs, that enables research students to achieve successful academic, personal but also professional outcomes from their research degrees.

A good research student experience rests on the integration of the various elements of the research process across the different stages of the research student journey. Clearly central to this experience is the research supervisor-supervisee relationship but equally important are the other support functions including postgraduate research administrative support and the range of other student-facing services.

Academic support
The Hubs provide a platform for the academic aspects of the research student environment, including support for the acquisition of the range of research and personal skills that are likely to be needed by early career researchers. This is primarily supported through the research supervisor-supervisee relationship with additional layers of support through the research infrastructure including Hub events and the Researcher Development Programme. Health and safety advice relevant to research, as well as opportunities for participating in conferences or more discipline focussed training activities are also discussed at Hub level.
Cohort research skills support is provided through the University’s Postgraduate Certificate in Research. All research students are expected to undertake and achieve this qualification, unless they can demonstrate as part of their training analysis previous achievement of the learning outcomes of the course.

As well as the supervisor and the supervisory team, the Hub PGR Co-ordinator is also an important component of the research support and guidance available for all research students within a Hub. Working with Graduate Studies, the research supervisors and Hub PGR Co-ordinators ensure the implementation of the relevant policies and procedures in relation to research degrees. Graduate Studies manages the supporting infrastructure for the research degree students, including the Doctoral Research Centre, and arranges for appropriate IT provision, desk space and (where required) facilitates appropriate access to additional facilities and equipment.

Postgraduate research administration
The Graduate Studies team, in association with Academic Services, coordinates the development and implementation of the University’s quality assurance and enhancement systems for postgraduate research provision. The team provides administrative support for postgraduate research students and supervisors, and offers guidance for staff and potential applicants who wish to apply to study for a postgraduate research degree at the University. The team work directly with Nottingham Trent University, the degree awarding body, to co-ordinate the various aspects of the postgraduate research student journey. The team also supports the promotion of good practice across the University ensuring both quality and consistency in approach and experience for PGR students.

The Graduate Studies team’s main administrative duties are to:
• act as a point of liaison for student administrative matters
• provide information about postgraduate research degree programme and the processes which support it including managing the research student web and portal pages
• offer advice and support to students and supervisors
• provide administrative support for the Research Degrees Committee (RDC)
• support the enhancement of the research environment for research students including supporting the annual Research & Innovation conference, coordinating and contributing to the training sessions for new supervisors and independent chairs, providing the initial ‘meet and greet’ for new research students, and supporting on-going enhancement activities in association with staff, students and external agencies including VITAE

Academic quality
The University is committed to ensuring the quality of the doctoral learning experience and the infrastructure aligns with the QAA UK Quality Code - Chapter B11 (Research Degrees) and the QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualification (FHEQ). Graduate Studies, in conjunction with Academic Services, is responsible for maintaining and enhancing a series of Policies, Procedures and a Code of Practice for postgraduate research degrees available at:

http://www.solent.ac.uk/research/postgraduate-research/postgraduate-research.aspx

The Code is supported by Guidance Notes designed specifically to provide staged student and staff-facing guidance on each aspect of the research student journey. All policies and procedures can be found in the University Academic Handbook.

The guidance notes support the following stages:
#1. Key principles and institutional arrangements
# 2. Roles and responsibilities / managing the supervisory relationship
# 3. Admissions & registration
#4. Project approval
#5. Transfer (from MPhil registration to PhD)
#6. Annual monitoring
#7. Submission and examination
Academic Services provides additional guidance on:
#8. Misconduct, appeals and complaints
#9. Students studying under a tier 4 student visa

Students are central to the University processes for monitoring, reviewing and enhancing the research student experience at Solent. The research degree student body is represented on key committees, including the Research Degrees Committee and the Research and Innovation Committee. The Research Degrees Committee has a standing agenda item dedicated to research degree student matters.

**Student Support**

There are a range of support services and resources at Southampton Solent University which recognise the distinctive nature of research degree study and the needs of research students.

*Learning Information Services*

Students can access a wide variety of support via the library and Learning Services. As well as accessing a range of print and electronic resources subscribed to by the library, students can gain access to materials held elsewhere via Inter-Library Loans or the SCONUL Access Scheme. Students can book appointments with dedicated information librarians to discuss research requirements and get advice on a number of issues ranging from online searching and referencing to open access publishing. Further information is available on the portal via [http://portal.solent.ac.uk/library/help/factsheets/resources/library-services-research-postgrad.pdf](http://portal.solent.ac.uk/library/help/factsheets/resources/library-services-research-postgrad.pdf).

Research students can access learning skills advice online via Succeed@Solent, tutorials ([http://mycourse.solent.ac.uk/succeed](http://mycourse.solent.ac.uk/succeed)), or book individual appointments with Dr Carina Buckley, Learning Skills Tutor.

Support for a range of IT applications is available from the Learning Resource Centres, either in person or via the IT and Media portal pages ([http://portal.solent.ac.uk/it-and-media/it-and-media.aspx](http://portal.solent.ac.uk/it-and-media/it-and-media.aspx)).

*Student Hub*

These student support services cover a wide range of areas, such as: study skills, accommodation, careers and employability, disability and learning difficulties, equality and access, faith, finance, health and wellbeing, appeals and complaints, and international studies. ([http://portal.solent.ac.uk/support/support.aspx](http://portal.solent.ac.uk/support/support.aspx))

*The Students’ Union*

The Students’ Union supports students through its representation activities, in particular where impartial advice is critical. While working closely with the University, the Students’ Union operates independently and this is reflected in the support they are able to provide ([http://www.solentsu.co.uk](http://www.solentsu.co.uk))