

CASE STUDY FOR UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE

ADAPTATION OF PAR FOR POSTGRADUATE USE

The group involved were 5 postgraduate (MA and MLitt students in Classics).

They were given a PAR which was slightly adapted from the one used in English at Newcastle. A minority did not find it particularly helpful and were the least conscientious in keeping the PARs up-to-date. However, the following observations can be made (albeit based upon a tiny sample):

1. PARs at PG level have the same advantages as at UG level of providing accurate, up-to-date information about the student and the student's programme and progress through it.
2. All the postgraduates involved had programmes in which there was quite a lot of choice and a lot of decisions to be made about individual topics to be followed. The PGs found the reflective element the most useful part of the PAR. It enabled them and their tutors to agree timetables for production of work, review progress and identify problems. This outcome is the exact reverse of the experience with undergraduates in English, where the self-reflective part of the PARs is the least successful element to date.
3. The sequence and structure of meetings has evolved over this year. Initially both postgraduates and tutors intended to report on every development. This proved unnecessary and impractical. In the informal atmosphere of the Department of Classics, postgraduates meet staff very regularly. It is very easy to sort out minor problems, review progress and give advice informally. There was no point in attempting to record all these events. Instead a series of rather more formal reviews was instituted (up to 3 a term - though in practice it seems to be working out at 2), in which tutor and student concentrate on progress, plans and problems. Next year the PAR reports of these reviews may be structured to provide a more specific agenda for such meetings.
4. Although the PARs have not been given to PhD students, the experience of this year suggests that they could be a very useful tool here as well. They could provide a frame work for ensuring that progress is regularly reviewed and that the student reflects in a structured way on work. PARs could be a valuable tool in helping to achieve quality in postgraduate supervision.