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4Q Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Degrees

Introduction

1. This Code of Practice is informed by the QAA UK Quality Code Chapter B11 (Research Degrees). Further and more detailed information can be found in the Academic Handbook, sections 2Q and 2R, the Guidance Note series and the postgraduate research webpages.

2. The content of the Code of Practice sets out the University's view of what constitutes good practice for postgraduate research. It is addressed to all those involved in postgraduate research programmes: applicants, registered students on a research degree programme, as well as academic staff and support staff involved in the management and implementation of good practice in all aspects of the postgraduate research student experience including admissions, progression, supervision, examination, pastoral care and general student support, and the wider research environment.

Institutional arrangements

3. Nottingham Trent University (NTU) awards the University's postgraduate research degrees through a long-established agreement. Southampton Solent University has responsibility for the effectiveness of its arrangements, including the admissions, monitoring and progressing of students, enhancing the quality of postgraduate research provision and the student experience. Operational responsibility for overseeing the University's research degree provision is delegated to the Research Degrees Committee by Academic Board.

4. The Research Degrees Committee has three primary elements to its remit:

   - to act on behalf of Academic Board in monitoring quality and standards and approving the regulatory framework for research degree students;
   - to act as project approval and progression board; and
   - to promote and enhance the quality of the student experience.

5. Graduate Studies has administrative responsibility for research degree students, while the schools retain academic, supervisory and financial responsibility.

Research environment

6. The Southampton Solent University Research and Innovation Hubs underpin a rich array of research at the University. Research degree students, researchers and practitioners operate at the leading edge of their disciplines and enjoy connecting through the hubs, thus forming communities of practice. They learn from each other interacting face-to-face and through online networks, encouraging the sharing of good practice. Together they work as part of an emerging but strong community.

7. At the heart of the University's Research and Innovation Strategy lies the student experience and partnership work between the University and employers, through knowledge creation and exchange, professional practice, and entrepreneurship. It is in line with the University's mission statement, which focuses on the needs of employers and preparing students to succeed in a competitive world.

8. The University is committed to providing a supportive research environment for staff and research students that enables engagement with the wider research community as well as fostering creative research and scholarly works, developing skills and facilitating networking. Infrastructure, facilities and various research degree student focused initiatives aim to enrich the experience of research degree students and act as a career enhancing platform, offering them a wide range of opportunities to develop. Research degree students have dedicated accommodation and are members of the Research and Innovation Hubs.

9. The University is committed to enhance the research environment by offering further opportunities, with the use of modern technologies, in order to build a vibrant research student community, in partnership with the schools and with the engagement of the Student's Union.

10. Offers to study for a research degree programme will only be made to applicants where the University is able to provide an appropriate supervision as well as a supportive and active research environment. It is the responsibility of the Hubs and specifically the Hub PGR co-ordinator to ensure that the environment is adequate and conducive to good-quality research.

Ethics

11. The University fully supports the 'Concordat to Support Research Integrity' developed by Universities, which sets out commitments to those involved in research, underpinned by the highest standards of rigour and integrity.

12. Southampton Solent University requires that ethical clearance must be obtained before any research project or activity can commence and potential human participants can be approached. It is the responsibility of the research degree student to obtain ethical clearance, either by way of an Ethics Release (self-certificated using an Ethics Release Checklist) or a Full Ethical Review (decision made by an Ethics Standing Panel or a Specialist Ethics Committee). Students are required to discuss the ethical dimension with their supervisors at the beginning of their research degree programme and in the event of any changes to their research methodology.

Intellectual Property

13. A key aim of the University is to encourage and facilitate discovery, development and application of Intellectual Property (IP), maximising the benefit to the University, its staff and students and also the wider society. The creativity and involvement of research degree students are crucial in this endeavor and are encouraged through provision of this

framework to promote, recognise, evaluate, protect and exploit IP. Reward for creators of the IP is a key aspect of this framework.

14. The University's Intellectual Property Rights Policy sets out the framework to recognise and reward the contribution of staff and students. Research degree students are encouraged to contact the University Intellectual Property Advisory Panel (IPAP) to discuss any commercial and financial benefit arising from Intellectual Property (IP) created as part of their research project.

Professional Development

15. Research degree students can expect institution-wide opportunities to increase the visibility of their research and celebrate their work. The University is keen to offer support that enables research students to achieve successful academic, personal but also professional outcomes from their research degree.

Recruitment and admission

16. The University ensures that all promotional and marketing materials about the research undertaken at the University and opportunities for research students are fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

17. Admissions procedures are designed to be clear and to be consistently applied to ensure equality of opportunity, confidentiality, and that only appropriately prepared students are admitted on to research programmes.

18. Full details of the admissions process can be found in the guidance notes series.

19. Programmes of research maybe proposed in any field of study, subject to availability of supervision and the requirement that the proposed programme is capable of leading to the stated learning outcomes for the proposed award.

20. An individual may apply to be admitted to read for a research degree, as follows:

    - Master of Philosophy (MPhil);
    - Master of Philosophy with the possibility to transfer to Doctor of Philosophy (PhD);
    - Doctor of Philosophy (PhD - direct registration onto PhD is exceptional); or
    - Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) by publication

21. Information on admissions procedures and requirements for acceptance are made available to applicants through the University's website. Application is by completion of a University form, evidence of qualifications (or equivalent experience), and two references. Admissions decisions take into account the candidate's qualifications, curriculum vitae, and relevant experience. Candidates are normally interviewed in person, by phone or 'Skype'.

22. Admissions decisions take into account whether a self-funded candidate has, or is likely to secure, the necessary financial support to enable them to undertake their studies for the duration of the programme. Admissions decisions also take into account the needs and requirements of students with disabilities and their special needs.

23. Where applicable, appropriate evidence of competency in the use of English is required, as well as a relevant visa to study in the UK. Candidates applying from a number of countries are required, under Home Office Policy, to pay a deposit in order to be granted a visa for entry before they are allowed to start their studies.

24. Decisions to offer places to students are made by the Hub Scrutiny Panel under the aegis of the Hub PGR Co-Ordinator. The Panel must satisfy themselves that:

- the applicant is suitably qualified and, in the case of application for full-time studies, has access to adequate financial support;

- appropriate resources are in place;

- the student is embarking on research in a field that will yield a viable research project and for which expert supervision is available;

- the University is able to provide appropriate facilities for the conduct of scholarly research in the area of the research programme;

- an initial training needs analysis has been undertaken; and

- there has been an appropriate preliminary allocation of a Director of Studies and at least one other supervisor.

25. Offer letters are issued by Graduate Studies and contain the following information:

- the mode of study (full-time or part-time)
- the expected total annual fees, and other relevant financial matters
- confirmation of the nature of the proposed research project
- type of programme, normally students are registered initially for an MPhil with the possibility to transfer to a PhD upon successful completion of their transfer
- the expected period of study for which the applicant is invited to register
- supervision arrangements
- proposed start date
- the requirements placed by the University on the applicant (for example engaging in training on research methods, progress reports and minimum contact with supervisors)
- arrangements for registration
- how to find the relevant policies, and research degree related information
- the responsibilities of the applicant for his or her academic studies and the expectations placed by the University upon its students
- any relevant conditions attached to the offer (where applicable)
- the date by which the candidate should confirm (or otherwise) acceptance of the offer

26. The University encourages the provision of constructive feedback to unsuccessful candidates and students may appeal the decision in accordance with University Admissions policy (Admissions Policy, 2J).

Registration

27. The minimum and maximum periods of registration are as follows:

MPhil	Minimum	Maximum
Full-time	18 months	36 months
Part-time	30 months	72 months
PhD (via transfer from MPhil registration and including period of MPhil registration)	**Minimum**	**Maximum**
Full-time	24 months	48 months
Part-time	48 months	96 months

PhD (direct)	Minimum	Maximum
Full-time	24 months	48 months
Part-time	48 months	96 months

28. These periods of registration include any writing-up period.

29. All research degree students must register as a student of the University, and continue to re-register, at the start of each academic session, until the submission of the thesis has taken place. At the time of registration, students must pay such fees as may be determined by the University.

30. Research degree students must have their research project approved by the Research Degrees Committee, normally within six months of registration for full-time students and twelve months for part-time students. Where a project proposal is not approved, the student will be given an opportunity to resubmit their proposal. If, after the student has been given the opportunity to remedy defects, the proposal remains unsatisfactory, the Research Degrees Committee will normally ask that the student's registration be withdrawn.

31. Research degree students who have completed their programme of research for an MPhil or PhD and are in the final stages of 'writing-up', requiring no further supervision prior to the submission of their thesis, may be allowed to transfer to 'writing-up' fees status.

32. The University implements appropriate policies, in relation to, for example, academic misconduct, ethics, fees and student debts, IT security, and internet usage. These policies can be found on the University Portal.

Facilities

33. Whilst the facilities made available to research degree students differ according to the nature of their projects, as a minimum the University expects every full-time student to have reasonable access to:

   a. IT and telecommunication resources, including the use of a PC, adequate software, and access to a telephone line;
   b. printing and photocopying facilities;
   c. library resources, including the inter-library loan facility;
   d. working space in the research centre; and
   e. specialist in-house facilities.

Support and advice

34. The University has a well-established network of advice, guidance and support services for all students.

35. The Student Hub Information Centre offers information, advice and guidance on a range of topics, provides a selection of leaflets and offer access to the following services:

   - Careers & Employability
   - Chaplaincy
   - Counselling
   - Health Advice
   - Hypnotherapy
   - Funding
   - Mental Health Service
   - International Advice

- Student Affairs

36. Graduate Studies provides administrative assistance to applicants and research degree students throughout their period of study.

Diversity and equality

37. The University aims to foster a community with a culture of mutual trust, fairness, harmony and respect. The University implements policies to promote fair treatment and equality of opportunity for all present and potential students, regardless of age, disability, ethnic or national origin, family responsibility or social class, gender identity, membership of professional associations or trade unions, marital/civil partnership status, political or religious beliefs, race, sex and sexual orientation.

Supporting disabled students

38. The University encourages a supportive and accessible environment for disabled students. Disabled students, including those with dyslexia or other specific learning difficulties and those with mental health needs, are advised to discuss their individual needs with specialist staff at the Student Hub Information Centre.

Induction

39. Students are provided with an induction programme which offers them opportunities to understand the institutional, academic and research environment within which they will be working. To help ensure that new research degree students commence their studies with an understanding of the environment, they are offered three induction events:

    i. '*meet and greet*': This event is run after registration. This is the first *opportunity for new students to meet other students and learn essential information about their experience as a student at the University. After the event, students are able to access the University online learning resources via the Portal, contact key people such as their Hub PGR Co-Ordinator*, Director of Studies, librarians, and their student representative. They should know how to get in touch with *student support services and the University Student's Union*.

    ii. *University induction: Students are given* a detailed overview of the institutional arrangements and policies relating to the provision of research degrees. After attending the main University induction, students should understand the key stages in the research degree life-cycle, and their associated timescales. They should also have an understanding of their responsibilities as a research degree student.

    iii. *Hub induction*: Students are given details of the facilities available to them within their Hub. They are also briefed on how they will be supported in their personal development by the Hub.

Supervision arrangements

40. The University has clear policies for the appointment of research degree supervisors. These are supplemented by eligibility criteria for supervisors, which are applied by the Chair of the Hub Scrutiny Panel before allocating research supervisory teams.

41. Appropriate supervisory arrangements satisfy the following guidelines:

- Each research degree student is supervised by a team which is led by an appropriately experienced Director of Studies and includes at least one other supervisor
- There is always one supervisor who is a member of the University's academic staff
- Supervisors should not exceed the maximum loading of research degree students (including writing-up students)
- No supervisor should have any conflict of interest with their research degree student(s)
- Supervisory teams should have experience of supervising at least two students to the successful completion of a UK research degree or equivalent International qualification

42. Supervisors are expected to undertake Continued Professional Development (CPD) opportunities, including the Supervision Training Programme for new supervisors. Experienced supervisors are invited and expected to attend the Supervision Training Programme periodically, as refresher.

Responsibilities of the University Research Degrees Committee

43. The Research Degrees Committee is responsible for the effectiveness of the University's arrangements for monitoring academic standards and for enhancing academic quality in research degree provision. Thus, it ensures that the University's policies and procedures are observed and promote best practice in the registration, induction, supervision, training, progression, and assessment of research degree students. In addition, the Research Degrees Committee monitors the University research degree provision against indicators that reflect the context in which research degrees are being offered.

Responsibilities of the Schools and Research and Innovation Hubs

44. Schools and Hubs are responsible for academic and financial decisions relating to research degree students. Schools and Hubs seek guidance from Graduate Studies on the administrative requirements and procedures on issues affecting, for example, the registration (including suspensions and extensions of period of studies), progression and assessment of their students.

45. Hubs establish and maintain the Hub Scrutiny Panel that has specific responsibility for receiving and assessing applications to study for a research degree. In addition, the Hub Scrutiny Panel is responsible for monitoring the progress of their students and its Chair reports on student status to the Research Degrees Committee.

46. Hubs are responsible for ensuring that full-time students have a place to work, normally in a research centre, and can access the facilities that they need for their programme of work.

47. It is the responsibility of the Hubs to ensure that supervisors carry out their duties and monitor the progress of their students.

48. Hubs are encouraged by the University to arrange seminars on a regular basis at which students can present their work.

The supervisor/student relationship

49. The successful completion of a programme of study leading to the award of a research degree requires considerable commitment from the research student and the student's supervisors. The various roles and responsibilities of both parties involved with the research project should be identified and understood at the start of the programme.

Supervision is a partnership between supervisor and student. Both partners have rights and responsibilities, which are clearly defined in the Guidance Note series. Good supervision relationship usually involves discussing the following criteria early on: expectations; encouragement; confidentiality; feedback; level of support; ownership; belonging, etc...

50. The University recognises that the frequency of formal supervision meetings varies according to the conventions of the subject area, the nature of the research, availability of both parties, the stage in the studies, and progress made. However, students should have reasonable access to members of his/her supervisory team. There is an expectation that supervisory meetings (face-to-face or by other means) should be held normally fortnightly for full-time students and monthly for part-time students. Suitable arrangements to cover holiday periods or any other period of extended absence from the University should be agreed at the earliest opportunity.

51. The first meeting between the research degree student and his/her Director of the Studies should take place within days of the start of the student's period of study. Discussion should normally include supervision arrangements, frequency of meetings, expectations, and the nature of research in the specific discipline.

Training

52. As part of the application and induction process a training needs analysis will be undertaken by the Director of Studies.

53. In their first year of registration, research degree students are registered on the Postgraduate Certificate in Research and are expected to attend the course and achieve the award. Only those students who can effectively demonstrate that they have already achieved the learning outcomes in research methods will be exempt.

54. Research degree students who wish to undertake teaching duties must apply to become an associate lecturer and undertake the necessary training.

55. Where appropriate, research degree students may be encouraged to attend taught classes, at undergraduate or postgraduate level. Attendance to these classes is subject to availability and faculty approval.

Development of research and other skills

56. The University recognises the importance of providing a range of opportunities for research degree students to engage in personal and professional development.

57. Research degree students are expected to maintain a record of personal progress, including the setting up and maintenance of their own Skills Development Plan.

58. Throughout their programme of study, students have access to advice and guidance from the Student Hub to help them make informed decisions about their career direction.

Monitoring the progress of research degree students

59. Supervisors must regularly monitor the work carried out by their research degree students and provide feedback on the quality of the student's work. In addition, the University has formal mechanisms to review the progress of its research degree students.

60. The progress of students is formally reviewed twice a year. The reviews are administered by Graduate Studies, but it is the responsibility of the Hubs to ensure that timely and

diligent review is carried out. The purpose and procedures of the monitoring and progression requirements are explained in the Guidance Note series. In summary, the function of these monitoring exercises is to confirm the student's active engagement and satisfactory progress with their programme of training and of research.

61. The two formal monitoring points are as follows:

   i. *Independent review*:
      - As part of the independent review, the student meets with an experienced supervisor (who is not part of the supervisory team). The meeting leads to the production of a joint report agreed by the student and the reviewer on the student's progress.
      - The Hub Scrutiny Panel examines the outcome of the independent review and feeds back to the Research Degrees Committee.

   ii. *Progression review*
      - The student and the Director of Studies complete separate reports, then meet to discuss the content of these reports. The meeting may lead to the amendment of those reports.
      - The Hub Scrutiny Panel examines the outcome of the progression review in the form of the two reports and recommends to the Research Degrees Committee renewal (or not) of registration.
      - If the Research Degrees Committee agrees that progress has been unsatisfactory, it will agree the action plan put forward by the Hub for the student; and the student will be subject to a three months period of probation. If there is no improvement in the student's performance at the end of the period, the Research Degrees Committee will normally request the withdrawal of the student's registration, or in the case of a PhD registration, the student may be offered the opportunity to re-register for an MPhil.

62. A student will not be allowed to progress if the progression review forms have not been submitted to Graduate Studies prior to the Hub Scrutiny Panel review meeting.

Transfer of registration from MPhil to PhD

63. Students are expected to transfer from MPhil to PhD, normally after at least 12 months of full-time study and before 18 months (24-36 months for part-time study).

64. In order to transfer the candidate must prepare a Transfer Report and meet with a Review Panel, which normally consists of members of the supervisory team and two independent assessors.

65. The Review Panel gives the student informal, verbal feedback at the end of the review meeting. After the meeting, the Panel writes a Transfer Report and states which recommendation applies, e.g. transfer to PhD, resubmission, or registration to remain as MPhil. The Transfer Report is then submitted to the Research Degrees Committee, via Graduate Studies, for approval.

66. The Research Degrees Committee attaches great weight to the Panel's Transfer Report. Before approving a recommendation from the Transfer Panel, the Research Degrees Committee satisfies itself that the candidate has made sufficient progress and that the assessors have determined that the proposed programme provides a suitable basis for work at PhD standard which the candidate is capable of pursuing to completion within agreed time scales.

67. In the event of an unsatisfactory transfer application, the Research Degrees Committee may offer the candidate the opportunity to revise the application in light of feedback from the Panel. If after such opportunity, the transfer application is not approved, the student remains registered for an MPhil.

Completion

68. The Director of studies and student should agree a timetable for completion in order to allow sufficient time for the following:

  - comments and feedback from the supervisors on the thesis;
  - agreement of the thesis title;
  - length of the thesis;
  - appointment of examiners;
  - online submission of the thesis to Turnitin;
  - submission of the soft bound thesis and accompanying creative work, where applicable, to Graduate Studies;
  - Preparation for the viva (i.e. mock viva)

69. While a student would be unwise to submit their work for examination against the advice of their supervisors, it is his/her right to do so. Equally, students should not assume that the supervisor's agreement to the submission of the work guarantees the award of the degree.

70. The final submission must be the candidate's own work, and the responsibility for writing, preparing and submitting the work and/or thesis within the permitted registration period rests with the candidate.

71. The final submission must conform to the relevant scholarly requirements and be of an appropriate length.

72. The student must ensure that the final submission is submitted to Graduate Studies before the registration period ends.

Assessment

73. The procedures for the assessment and award of research degrees are set by Nottingham Trent University.

74. The final examination is by assessment of the thesis, and creative work, where applicable, as well as viva.

75. The viva is chaired by an Independent Chair whose role is as follows:

  - Ensuring that regulations are applied and procedures follows before, during and after the viva;
  - Safeguarding the candidate's interests;
  - Ultimate responsibility for the way the viva is conducted; and
  - Responsible for the due completion of all paperwork associated with the viva.

76. The viva is conducted by at least two examiners, one of whom must be external to the University. The supervisor is not part of the assessment process, though may, by agreement, be present at the viva.

77. After the oral examination, the examiners write a report which states the outcome of the viva.

78. The result of the examination is officially communicated to the student by Graduate Studies.

Suspension and extension of the period of registration

79. Exceptionally a student may apply to the Research Degrees Committee for a temporary suspension or extension of registration. Applications are considered on an individual basis and a case must be made by the student, with supporting evidence, which will be judged on merit. Approval will not automatically be granted.

80. A student may apply for a temporary suspension of registration for a period of not less than a month and not more than a year at a time. Applications for suspension of registration will only be considered in circumstances related to illness/accident, or exceptional personal circumstances beyond their control. If the student applies for a suspension of registration due to illness, a medical certificate must be provided. In some circumstances, fees may still be payable during a period of suspension.

81. The student may also exceptionally extend their period of registration beyond the permitted maximum, normally for not more than one year. Extensions are considered for time unavoidably lost through circumstances outside the control of the student.

82. It is important that Directors of Studies contact Graduate Studies for advice before their students begin a period of suspension or when they reach the end of their registration period, as failure to follow the relevant procedures will jeopardise the application.

Student representation and feedback mechanisms

83. Students are central to University monitoring and review processes. The research degree student body is represented on key committees, such as the Research and Innovation Committee, the Research Degrees Committee, and the University Ethics Committee. The Research Degrees Committee has a standing agenda item dedicated to research degree student matters.

84. Several mechanisms are used to obtain feedback from various sources including current students and external examiners. The University has established mechanisms in place to review and respond to the feedback, as appropriate.

85. Opportunities for feedback are provided for research degree students at Hub level to discuss discipline-specific matters, or matters related to their research centres.

Appeals and complaints

86. Candidates may make a formal appeal to request consideration of an examination decision, or a registration issue.

87. Any appeal may only be made on the grounds indicated below:

- The candidate's level of achievement was adversely affected by illness or other factors which s/he was unable to divulge to the supervisory team or the examiners at the appropriate point within the earlier procedures.

- There is new and relevant information that was not available to be considered at the time of the original decision.

- There has been a material irregularity in the conduct of progress reviews of the candidate undertaken by the Research Degrees Committee.

- There has been a material administration error in the arrangements and/or conduct of the examination, such as to cause doubt on the validity of the examiners' decision.

- The candidate can prove that unfair discrimination has occurred.

88. Students should attempt to discuss any dissatisfaction with their research degree programme with a member of their supervisory team in the first instance. If this is not possible, they should raise the matter informally and confidentially with a Student Hub Counsellor, who will be able to provide advice and guidance.

89. A student wishing to raise a formal complaint must do so in accordance with the University Complaint Procedure.

90. Independent assistance is available for any student wishing to lodge a formal appeal or complaint.