

Research Degrees: Guidance notes series

4. PROJECT APPROVAL

Author Research & Innovation

Last updated September 2017

Key words: research proposal, RD1PA, the Research Degrees Committee, ethics, Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)

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Related document	Policy 2Q: Admission, supervision and monitoring of research students The IPR Policy The Ethics Policy Procedures for ethical approval R1PA form, available on the Portal
Further reading	How to apply for ethical clearance at Southampton Solent University http://portal.solent.ac.uk/research-and-innovation/ethics/ethics.aspx ETHICS: A recommended reading list http://portal.solent.ac.uk/research-and-innovation/ethics/resources/ethics-reading-list.pdf?t=1510852880921 British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2011) https://www.bera.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/BERA-Ethical-Guidelines-2011.pdf?noredirect=1 Intellectual Property Rights at Southampton Solent University http://portal.solent.ac.uk/research-and-innovation/intellectual-property-rights/intellectual-property-rights.aspx The Intellectual Property Office (IPO) http://www.ipo.gov.uk/
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General principles

1. Postgraduate research students must have their research project approved by the relevant Postgraduate Research Scrutiny Panel, 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 this opportunity, the proposal remains unsatisfactory, the Postgraduate Research Scrutiny Panel will normally withdraw the student's registration.
2. There is a lot of work involved in producing the RD1PA. The supervisory team will need time to read the draft and provide comments before the final version is finalised. It is therefore essential that the supervisors are given adequate time to provide feedback on the work.

Overall process

3. Students seeking project approval should normally within six months of registration for full-time students and twelve months for part-time students. It is the student's responsibility to complete the following points;
 - a) Complete the Project Approval Form, RD1PA (available on the Portal);
 - b) Liaise with their Supervisory Team to finalise content;
 - c) Send the final version to Research & Innovation (via research.degree@solent.ac.uk) for completion of supervisory details;
 - d) Submit the final version to Turnitin (via Solent online learning <https://learn.solent.ac.uk>)

This will then lead to the following actions;

- e) Research & Innovation will forward the RD1PA to the PGR coordinator.
 - f) DoS and PGR coordinator shall arrange a meeting which should involve a minimum of 2 relevant academics.
 - g) The meeting should open with a short presentation by the student, followed by questions and answers, and discussion.
4. Students are advised to seek approval, review and signatures early. If an RD1PA is submitted to Research & Innovation incomplete (i.e. with information missing or incorrect, or attachment and/or signature missing) it will be sent back to the student for revision.
6. It is the student's responsibility throughout their registration to ensure that ethical approval be obtained prior to undertaking any research where ethical approval is required.

The RD1PA

7. When completing form RD1PA- applicants are asked to take particular care not to alter the layout of the form or delete sections.
8. The 'title of the proposed investigation' will normally appear on the front of the thesis. However, the student will have a chance to amend it before submitting their final thesis.
9. The 'aims of the investigation' should be as few and succinct as possible. Ideally the student should be able to express each aim of their project in a single sentence.
10. The 'proposed plan of work' section must normally contain no more than 2500 words. Given the word restriction it is important to be concise and economical. The supervisors will of course comment and advise as appropriate. The content and approach to the plan will vary from project to project and discipline to discipline. However the Scrutiny Panel will normally expect to see:
 - a) A rationale for the project - what research objectives the project will address, why they are important, and how they follow on from previous work;
 - b) An indication and brief justification of the theoretical perspective underpinning the project;
 - c) A description of the methods - why they are appropriate, how they will be used and an understanding of their limits. Students are asked to be as precise as possible about the research design, sampling methods, etc... It would be helpful to give a brief indication of the questions to be addressed at each stage of the research and how they relate back to the research aims;
 - d) A statement of sources to be used - For example, if the project depends on access to external organisations, confirmation of access is critical and must demonstrate confidence that within reason there will be no issues with access;
 - e) Ethical consideration - Ethical issues raised by the research methods must be discussed, as

well as how these issues will be addressed; and

- f) A timetable for the project, showing when and in what order, the student proposed to conduct different parts of the project. The use of a Gantt chart can help with this.
11. If the student is registering for MPhil with possibility of transfer to PhD, they should indicate the stage at which they propose to apply for transfer to registration to PhD.
 12. If the student is aiming at a PhD (either by registering direct for PhD, or via MPhil with possibility of transfer) they should make sure to say why they think that the final PhD thesis/work will make an original contribution to knowledge.
 13. Students should give references for any work mentioned, or referred to, in their proposed plan of work. Students should use the Harvard system, i.e. (author, date: page number) in the text, with a list of references in alphabetical order of authors at the end of the proposed plan of work.
 14. The '*supervision*' section should be completed by the Research & Innovation in conjunction with the Postgraduate Research Coordinator. Students must insert a zero into any space where there is a nil return.
 15. Research & Innovation will not submit incomplete RD1PAs to the Scrutiny panel.
 16. The Scrutiny Panel will form their judgement based on the following criteria:
 - a) Are the aims of this project suitably ambitious? (the criteria for the award of a PhD are that the thesis/work must contain original, independent work of a publishable standard)
 - b) Is the project manageable within **three** years (or the equivalent period of part-time study)?
 - c) Is it clear how the project relates to previous research in this field?
 - d) Does the proposal demonstrate that there is a feasible and coherent plan of work?
 - e) Are the methods proposed for the research clear and appropriate? Does the proposal reflect a sound understanding of these methods, including their limitations?
 - f) Does the proposal fully and accurately acknowledge the range of resources that will be needed to complete this project satisfactorily, and does it demonstrate that they can and will be made available?
 - g) Are appropriate research training and other academic support mechanisms in place? In particular does the proposal identify any specialist training that this project will need, over and above the generic provision made by the faculty?
 - h) Are the supervisory arrangements satisfactory?
 - i) Does the design and conduct of this research raise any issues in relation to ethics and health & safety, and are they dealt with satisfactorily in the proposal?
 - j) MPhil or PhD? Students are asked to specify clearly whether they are recommending the project for registration for:
 - i. MPhil
 - ii. MPhil with possibility of transfer to PhD
 - iii. PhD
 17. Once final the RD1PA is submitted to Research and Innovation. The RD1PA will then be forwarded to the PGR Coordinator.
 19. The PGR coordinator and DoS will convene a panel to assess the RD1PA. The panel will include a Chair and two relevant academics. The DoS may be present, at the invitation of the student, but cannot take part. The Student will give a short presentation of 10 minutes to the Panel and answer any questions put to them.
 20. The Panel can decide whether to approve the project, or ask for minor or major revisions. Students will receive official notification of the decision in writing as soon as possible after the Panel meets. Students are encouraged to discuss the meeting with their supervisory team member if present. The PGR Coordinator, who chairs the meeting, will also be happy to advise if further work needs to be carried out.

21. Minor revisions are usually processed under Chair's action. The Panel reserves the right to ask for major revisions to be resubmitted to the panel with or without the student.
22. Where a project proposal is not approved by the PGR Scrutiny Panel, the student will normally be given an opportunity to seek approval for a revised project. If, after the student has been given this opportunity, the proposal remains unsatisfactory the Panel will normally ask that the student's registration be withdrawn.
23. Where a project approval has not been secured within the first six months of registration for full-time students (12 months for part-time students) the PGR Scrutiny Panel may deem this, in itself, to be evidence of unsatisfactory progress and may ask that withdrawal of registration be started.
24. A student seeking a change to an approved research degree programme must apply in writing to the PGR Scrutiny Panel Sub-Committee for approval, either as part of the project approval or, if the requirement emerges later, as a separate application. In any case, the student must apply, in the first instance, in writing to the PGR Coordinator.

Responsibilities of the Director of Studies

25. The Director of Studies should ensure that the student is given adequate academic advice and support in preparing for project approval and responding to subsequent requests to amend or resubmit.
26. Director of Studies may also wish to take advice from a member of the PGR Scrutiny Panel.

Ethics and risk

27. Many projects pose potential risk to the investigator or research participants, or raise other ethical issues. All project proposals must comply with the University process for ethical approval and candidates are required to seek appropriate ethical approval prior to conducting any fieldwork.
28. All students and supervisors should refer to the University Ethics Policy and procedures for seeking ethical approval. These documents are available on the Portal.

Overseas visits

29. Where overseas fieldwork is envisaged, a risk assessment must be drawn up by the Director of Studies and submitted to PGR Coordinator for approval before fieldwork begins.
30. Before fieldwork takes place, students and supervisors should agree a statement about how regular communication between them is to be maintained, including arrangements for submitting and commenting on the student's written work. Communication may be made by telephone, mail or via internet, and should take place at least once a month, and preferably more frequently. If applicable, this must be mentioned on the RD1PA.

Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)

31. All researchers in the University work within the regulations governing intellectual property rights. They are advised to familiarise themselves with the University Policy on Intellectual Property Rights and, where appropriate, seek further guidance by emailing the Intellectual Property Advisory Panel (IPAP): intellectual.property@solent.ac.uk.