

Research Degrees: Guidance notes series

4. PROJECT APPROVAL

Author	Graduate Studies
Last updated	July 2015

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/support/support-with-research/ethics/ethics.aspx ETHICS: A recommended reading list http://portal.solent.ac.uk/support/support-with-research/ethics/resources/ethics-reading-list.pdf British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2011) http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications Intellectual Property Rights at Southampton Solent University http://portal.solent.ac.uk/support/support-with-research/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 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 this opportunity, the proposal remains unsatisfactory, the Research Degrees Committee will normally withdraw the student's registration.
2. There is a lot of work involved in producing the RD1PA. The supervisory team and the Hub Scrutiny Panel 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:
 - 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 their Hub Postgraduate Research Coordinator for approval by the Hub Scrutiny Panel;
 - d) Submit the final version to Turnitin (via myCourse: <https://mycourse.solent.ac.uk>)
 - e) Once it has been approved by the Hub Scrutiny Panel, send the completed and signed hard copy of the form as well as an electronic version to Graduate Studies no later than two weeks before the next meeting of the Research Degrees Committee.

Responsibilities of the student

4. It is the responsibility of the student to check that the RD1PA is:
 - a) Duly completed, a nil return should be marked as zero or 'not applicable';
 - b) Duly signed - this includes the signature of all the members of the supervisory team (external supervisors may send an email confirmation in lieu of a signature);
 - c) Approved by the relevant Hub Scrutiny Panel; and
 - d) Sent to Graduate Studies no later than two weeks before the next meeting of the Research Degrees Committee (one hard copy and one electronic).
5. Students are advised to seek approval, review and signatures early. If an RD1PA is submitted to Graduate Studies 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. The student must attach evidence that their project has been granted ethical approval by the appropriate Ethics Committee Standing Panel.

The RD1PA

7. The completed form will be read by members of the Research Degrees Committee. They are all experienced academics but they come from a number of different disciplines, so students are asked to bear this in mind when drafting their proposed plan of work and avoid jargon that is understood only in their discipline.
8. When completing form RD1PA- applicants are asked to take particular care not to alter the layout of the form or delete sections.
9. 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. There is a 20 word limit to the title.
10. The '*aims of the investigation*' should be as few and succinct as possible. Ideally the student should be able to express the overall aim of their project in a single sentence.
11. The '*proposed plan of work*' section must normally contain no more than 2000 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 Research Degrees Committee will normally expect to see:

- a) A rationale for the project - what research question(s) 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.
12. 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.
 13. 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.
 14. 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.
 15. The '*supervision*' section should be completed by the Director of Studies in conjunction with the Hub Postgraduate Research Coordinator. Graduate Studies will provide information about the experience of supervisors and their supervision loading. Students must insert a zero into any space where there is a nil return.
 16. The Hub Scrutiny Panel will review all proposals and form a judgement as to whether it is of an appropriate standard. The Panel will provide feedback to the student and their supervisory team, and make a decision whether or not the RD1PA can be submitted to the Research Degrees Committee (via Graduate Studies) or be revised first.
 17. Graduate Studies will not submit incomplete RD1PAs to the Research Degree Committee.
 18. The Hub Scrutiny Panel and the Research Degree Committee 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) Do 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

Proceedings at RDC

- 19. Once final the RD1PA is submitted to Graduate Studies. The RD1PA will then be presented at a meeting of the Research Degrees Committee, normally by the Director of Studies.
- 20. The Committee 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 Committee meets. Students are encouraged, however, to seek feedback from their supervisory team member who would have presented the application for project approval to the Research Degrees Committee. The Hub Postgraduate Research Coordinator, who attends the Committee meeting, will also be happy to advise if further work needs to be carried out.
- 21. Minor amendments are usually processed under Chair's action and need not wait for the next Research Degrees Committee meeting but the Committee reserves the right to ask for substantial amendments to be resubmitted to the full committee meeting.
- 22. Where a project proposal is not approved by the Research Degrees Committee, 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 Research Degrees Committee 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 Research Degrees Committee 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 Research Degrees 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 writing to the Research Degrees Committee.

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 representative on the Research Degrees Committee.

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 Hub Scrutiny Panel Chair 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.