Approval of a research degree programme

Scope
All academic staff with a responsibility for the supervision and examination of research students and administrative staff who have a responsibility in supporting academic staff in this role.

Senate Regulations:
Regulation 24 – Doctoral Programmes
Regulation 23 – Masters Degree by Research

Date approved/re-approved
APPSC 30 September 2009

Date for review
To be reviewed on a periodic basis, with allowance for minor annual updates of roles and responsibilities by Graduate School Committee, as required.

To be read in conjunction with Section 9 of the University’s Quality Manual, in particular the University’s list of Approved Research Degree Routes and the Research Degree Typology.
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Research degree programmes are different to taught programmes with regard to their purpose and approach, the processes that oversee their quality and standards and the resources that are necessary to ensure that they are implemented and managed successfully. Nevertheless, the University has a responsibility to ensure that its research degree provision meets, if not exceeds, certain criteria. The aim of a programme approval process for research degrees, therefore, is to ensure that both the quality and standards of the proposed research degree programme are upheld and that the wider research agenda of the University is supported. The aim is to additionally ensure consistency of practice across the University in its approval of award bearing programmes in addition to enable the University to identify and share areas of good practice.

This policy has been designed to assist staff with a responsibility for managing research degree provision and is aimed at:

- Associate Deans (Research)
- Senior Tutors for Research
- Programme Directors
- Research Administrators

The University currently awards a variety of research degrees in a range of disciplines. A list of approved research degree titles (otherwise also known as routes) is available in the accompanying guidance. Approval of a new research degree title, or route, under an existing research degree programme currently offered within a School, Department or Centre within the University does not normally require programme approval unless the proposed title, or route, falls under any of the criteria listed below for the approval process of a research degree programme to be invoked. Schools, Departments or Centres are asked to complete the application for a local amendment should they wish to create a new research degree title under an existing research degree programme.

The circumstances under which an application for the approval of a new research degree programme may be invoked are:

- a new research degree programme is proposed, such as a new research degree under the umbrella of a professional doctorate
- a new research degree programme is proposed between two Schools, Departments or Centres within the University
- an alternative or distinct method of research presentation is proposed under a new or an existing research degree programme
- a joint research degree programme either between the University and other partner institutions within the UK or between the University and other partner institutions outside the UK is proposed
- an alternative mode of delivery of a new research degree programme, or, if appropriate, a new research degree title or route under an existing research degree programme, is proposed
- any amendment that makes a significant change to the market, viability or educational purpose of an existing research degree programme
- any area of the University where there is a desire to offer research degree programmes but where there is currently no existing provision.

November 2009
Any new proposal or an amendment to existing provision will be considered in relation to:

- The University’s Research Strategy
- The University’s Framework for Research Degree Provision
- The complementarity of the proposal in relation to other provision leading to an award of the University, or that which is planned, including that offered within validated institutions.

The University’s Regulations for Doctoral Programmes and Masters Degrees by Research and the Research Degree Typology should be consulted when the development of any new research degree programme is proposed. If there is any uncertainty about whether or not the proposal fits existing provision please contact the Head of Graduate School Office in Student and Academic Services in the first instance.

Where a new research degree title or route under an existing research degree programme, or a new research degree programme, within either an existing or a new validated institution is proposed the process for a new programme of study as outlined in the Validation and Institutional Partnerships Handbook will be followed.

Approval of a new research degree programme may consist of three stages. The stage or stages of the approval process that are applicable will depend on the type of approval that is being sought. Stage 0 is necessary when any proposed research degree programme involves partnership provision. Stage I consists of an application by the School, Department or Centre within the University or by a partner institution for approval-in-principle. Stage II consists of an application by the School, Department or Centre within the University, or by a partner institution, for approval of the educational structure and content of the proposed research degree programme.

**Stage 0: partnership provision**

Any proposal for a new research degree title or route under an existing research degree programme, or a new research degree programme within either a new or existing partner institution requires Stage 0 approval. Further information on Stage 0 approval is available from the Validation and Partnerships Manager in Student and Academic Services.

**Stage I: approval-in-principle**

The aim of the approval process at this stage is to ensure that:

- where appropriate, there is market demand for the proposed research degree programme, such as the need to meet professional and statutory body requirements
- there is strategic fit with the School, Department or Centre and the University and/or, where appropriate, with other new or existing partner institutions
- there is clear evidence of the ability of either the School, Department or Centre within the University or a new or existing partner institution to support the proposed research degree programme (such as personnel, library facilities) and, if not, that the additional resources will be provided to support the proposed programme
- any professional body or Research Council requirements have been considered
- resources have been allocated to accommodate the programme and any impact on current resource allocation on existing programmes has been considered
- there is evidence of a strong research culture within either the School or Department within the University or within a new or existing partner institution
- there is suitable expertise within the School, Department, Centre and/or partner institution to supervise research projects on the programme.

An application for Stage I approval demonstrates a commitment to develop the proposed research degree programme to the point where students will be recruited. Applications for Stage I approval should be submitted in sufficient time in order to allow for the full development, consideration, approval and marketing of the programme.

Where a proposal includes a taught element, a draft programme specification will need to be provided at this stage.

If appropriate, an external advisor should be nominated by the School, Department or Centre at Stage I in order that they may provide feedback on the development of the proposal in preparation for the second stage.

**Stage II: educational provision**

The aim of the programme approval process at this stage is to ensure that:

- any subject-specific training provision is appropriate and that generic training provision has been considered;
- peer review of any proposed research content and the appropriateness of the pedagogy or mode of delivery is considered;
- any proposed content meets the criteria for study at D level, i.e. by reference to the FHEQ descriptors.

Where a proposal includes a taught element, module specifications will need to be provided at this stage.