

3A.1 NEW RESEARCH PROGRAMME APPROVAL PROCEDURE AND GUIDANCE NOTES

These guidance notes and procedures have been prepared with reference to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, and their aim is to ensure that the University of Buckingham sets and maintains threshold academic standards for its awards.

Any deviation from the agreed procedures would require consultation with the Quality Assurance Office and agreement from the Chair of the University Research Committee.

GUIDANCE NOTES

A. Background

Research degree programmes range from research master's degrees to doctoral degrees. Some are more traditional academic programmes, others are routed in professional practice. Research degrees can include structured teaching aimed to enhance subject knowledge, and also develop research skills. Research degrees are distinguished from taught degrees in that the majority of students' time is spent undertaking independent research, with supervision and guidance.

B. Scope of Procedure

This procedure covers the following types of research programmes (all leading to the award of academic credit and/or contribute to a higher education award at Level 7 or above in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications):

- Programmes that include a structured element of teaching or assessment outside of the traditional thesis and/or requiring special regulations beyond those in the Research Degrees Handbook;
- Subject areas that do not form part of the current provision at the University;
- Research programmes which are partially or fully delivered (or directed) off campus;
- Research programmes delivered in partnership with third parties (e.g. hospitals, galleries)

The current procedure for approving individual PhD research degrees (provided the general subject area forms part of the current provision at the University) remains as outlined in the University Research Degrees Handbook, with individual research proposals being considered at School level.

C. Timing

Wherever possible, proposers of new programmes that fall within the scope above should begin their planning at least 12 months before the programme is due to begin. This is to ensure that there is sufficient time for consultation, development, committee approval, and marketing to be undertaken before programmes begin.

D. External Reference Points

Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/qualifications-frameworks.pdf>

The FHEQ sets out qualification descriptors that set out the generic outcomes and attributes expected for the award of individual qualifications. The fundamental premise of the FHEQ is that qualifications should be awarded on the basis of achievement of outcomes and attainment rather than years of study. When preparing a research programme of study, it is essential to ensure that all programmes and modules are aligned to the relevant qualification descriptor. The research Master's degree must be at Level 7 and the Doctoral degree must be at Level 8. The documentation put forward in support of a new research programme must provide evidence that the programme is set at the appropriate level for the qualification.

One of the most important purposes of the level descriptors is to achieve equivalence of academic standards across awards by summarising the key attributes expected of a graduate at that level. The master's and doctoral qualification descriptors promote a high level of consistency but still allow universities the autonomy they are entitled to as research degree awarding bodies. This allows institutions to supplement the generic requirements in the descriptors with detailed assessment criteria that are appropriate for different subjects and qualifications they wish to award.

QAA Quality Code, Chapter B11: Research Degrees

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Pages/Quality-Code-Chapter-B11.aspx#.VaeEOqJwaic>

The Quality Code sets out the formal Expectations that all UK higher education providers reviewed by QAA are required to meet. It is the nationally agreed, definitive point of reference for all those involved in delivering higher education programmes that lead to an award from, or are validated by, a UK higher education awarding body (a provider entitled to award degrees). All higher education providers reviewed by QAA must commit to meeting the Expectations that it sets out. The Code sets out Expectations and Indicators in respect of the systems, policies and procedures that are conducive to an excellent experience for research students and that support the University in maintaining the academic standards of its research degrees.

QAA (2015) Master's Degree Characteristics

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Masters-Degree-Characteristics-15.pdf>

This reference point offers guidance on the nature of different types of master's degree, all of which are expected to meet the outcomes identified in the qualification descriptor in the *Framework for HE Qualifications*. The characteristics described in it relate to the different ways in which a master's degree may be provided in delivering the outcomes identified in the national qualification descriptor. The University may also draw upon subject benchmark statements for research master's degrees in a particular subject or the guidance provided by the relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body.

QAA (2015) Doctoral Degree Characteristics

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Doctoral-Degree-Characteristics-15.pdf>

This guide provides a summary of UK doctoral degree characteristics, highlighting similarities and differences between doctoral degrees. It is a practical reference text that provides definitive information about UK doctoral programmes, including their purposes, structures, content, titles and assessment methods. The guide is complementary to the *Master's degree characteristics* and provides an extension of information from that publication.

Subject Benchmark Statements

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements>

Subject benchmark statements set out expectations about standards of degrees in a range of subject areas. They describe what gives a discipline its coherence and identity, and define what can be expected of a graduate in terms of the abilities and skills needed to develop understanding or competence in the subject. Subject benchmark statements do not represent a national curriculum in a subject area. Rather, they allow for flexibility and innovation in programme design within an overall conceptual framework established by an academic subject community. They are intended to assist those involved in programme design, delivery and review and may also be of interest to prospective students and employers, seeking information about the nature and standards of awards in a subject area.

Subject benchmark statements are available for master's degrees. Where there is no subject specific Subject benchmark Statement at Masters Level, reference should be made to "Masters degree characteristics (Sept 2015)"

E. Business Case

During the 'Development' stage of the process, proposers of new programmes are required to develop a Business Case (see appendix for form) for approval by the Executive Committee. This is to ensure that all new programmes are financially sustainable. The Business Case outlines the rationale for introduction; evidence of demand and the projected student intake; the fees, income and costs; the marketing strategy and any requirements for existing and additional resources. Once the Executive Committee has approved the Business Case, the form should also be included in the full documentation submitted to the School Board of Study and University Research Committee.

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1. Outline Permission

1.1 Obtain clearance from Dean (for Programmes) or Head of Department (for Modules).

2 Initial Consultations

2.1 Consult Quality Assurance Manager regarding QAA guidance and timeline for approval. Consult the Quality Assurance Manager to ensure that the award is permitted under University Regulations, and that any proposed Special Regulations for the award are also consistent with University Regulations.

2.2 Consult colleagues and others internally with expertise in the area.

2.3 Consult the Librarian and Head of IT (regarding library and IT resources)

2.4 Consult with the Visa Compliance Officer to establish whether the programme complies with Tier 4 visa requirements (e.g. relating to mode of teaching and attendance requirements). Consult the Head of Marketing and Admissions (regarding student demand and minimum numbers, marketing plan and viability).

2.5 Consult with the Head of HR to identify staffing needs.

2.6 Where necessary, consult with students and employers to establish demand.

3 Detailed Development

3.1 Business Case

3.1.2 For new programmes, a complete Business Case form should be completed (see template below) including the following:

- a) Draw up a rationale and give reasons for the introduction of the programme.
- b) Include evidence of demand and the projected student intake
- c) Include an outline of any marketing plans and the potential student market (including a consideration of any visa issues
- d) Include details of fees, income and costs associated with the programme
- e) Outline the existing and additional resources that the programme will require.

3.1.3 Submit the Business Case to the Dean of the relevant School who takes it to the Executive Committee for approval.

3.2 Academic Development and Documentation Requirements

Draw up your proposal to include the following information. This may be covered in various types of documents. For example: a written proposal/rationale, special programme regulations, programme and/or module specifications, lecture timetables/outlines, staff and student handbooks, contracts etc.

3.2.1 Programme Particulars

- Full award title, including the post nominal abbreviation (e.g. MA)
- Brief outline of programme aim
- Proposed start date
- Mode (full time/part time) and length of programme
- Any minimum and maximum registration periods
- Programme Director and relevant Research Officer
- Programme venue

3.2.2 Academic Regulations

- Outline units/credits (if these are assigned – see QAA doctoral guidance here).
- Level of the award (7 or 8) and detail of the criteria for the award if it differs from that in Section 1 of the Research Degree Handbook.
- Alignment with the relevant external reference points (see guidance notes)
- Alignment with existing University regulations and procedures as detailed in the University Research Handbook. Where these differ, provide detail of this.

3.2.3 Admissions and Marketing

- Admissions arrangements including entry requirements, credit transfers or admissions processes (e.g. interviews)
- Any relevant marketing plans

3.2.4 Teaching and Supervision

- Supervision arrangements - including as appropriate any differing arrangements for the appointment of supervisors, and list of supervisory staff
- Student induction and support arrangements (personal tutors etc)
- Teaching and curriculum information and supervision arrangements, and any detail on curriculum/seminar content, aims and learning outcomes, associated reading and list of teaching/lecturing staff, and any recruitment requirements

3.2.5 Progression and Review

- Progression and review arrangements, including alignment with University procedures for annual review and upgrades
- Alignment with University procedures for extension of time and suspension of studies.

3.2.6 Assessment and Examination

- Assessment arrangements, including detail of assessment types and weighting, and any additional grading, examining or progression procedures.

3.2.7 Learning Resources

- Learning resources required and provided, including IT and library, and the outcomes of any consultations with these relevant departments

3.2.8 Legal and Ethical Considerations

- Contractual information or agreements with third parties, including detail of responsibilities for admission teaching, assessment
- Ethical implications of the proposal – demonstrate these have been addressed by consulting with the appropriate School ethics representative.
- Outline and Health and Safety requirements have been met.

3.2.9 Complaints and Appeals

- Confirm alignment with University procedures for complaints and appeals

4 External Contributions

- 4.1 Proposers are encouraged to seek the comments and/or endorsement of relevant external academics, professionals or organisations as appropriate to submit with their proposal. If formal external review is required for structured teaching within of the programme, please contact the Quality Assurance Office.

5 Final Revisions

- 5.1 Proposer to amend documentation in light of external feedback/consultations.

6 Committee Stage

NB: Board and URC Chairman's action CANNOT be taken on approval of new programmes.

- 6.1 Proposer to submit full documentation to the School Research Committee and the School Board of Study. Board to approve (with or without conditions or recommendations), or reject the proposal in its submitted form, and make a recommendation to the University Research Committee (URC).
- 6.2 The University Research Committee to consider the Board of Study recommendations (supported by full documentation as indicated above), and approve (with or without conditions or recommendations) or reject the proposal in its submitted form.
- 6.3 URC to report its decision to Senate.