

Graduate School

Postgraduate Research (PgR) Code of Practice

2020

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Introduction

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education ([the Quality Code](#)) is the definitive reference point for all UK higher education providers. It makes clear what higher education providers are required to do, what they can expect of each other, and what the public can expect of them. Doctoral degrees are qualifications rooted in original research: the creation of new knowledge or originality in the application of knowledge. The doctorate is therefore unique in the array of qualifications offered by higher education providers. Other key reference points for doctoral degrees are the doctoral qualification descriptors included in the frameworks for higher education qualifications (for England, Wales and Northern Ireland and for Scotland) and [QAA's Characteristics statement for Doctoral Degrees](#) (2015).

Research degrees are awarded in a research environment that provides secure academic standards for doing research and learning about research approaches, methods, procedures and protocols. This environment offers students quality of opportunities and the support they need to achieve successful academic, personal and professional outcomes from their research degrees.

The UK Quality Code, Advice and Guidance: Research Degrees published in November 2018 sets out six guiding principles for research degrees. Those being:

1. Provision of information is clear and accessible to research students and staff.
2. The research environment is supportive and inclusive for all research students.
3. Supervisors are appropriately skilled and supported.
4. Research students are afforded opportunities for professional development.
5. Progression monitoring is clearly defined and operated.
6. Higher education providers offer clear guidance and processes on assessment for research degrees.

The guiding principles given here are not mandatory for any provider. They are a concise expression of the fundamental practices of the higher education sector, based on the experience of a wide range of providers. This code should be viewed alongside other University of Cumbria policies, for example, information about intellectual property, and health and safety.

Principle 1: Provision of information is clear and accessible to research students and staff.

All information is made available to prospective and current research students on the University website. There is specific Graduate School Blackboard Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) for all information related to our research degrees. All research students receive an annually refreshed Handbook for each of our research degrees.

For research student on the Masters of Research (MRes), Doctorate of Professional Studies (DProf), Doctorate of Education (EdD), and Doctorate of Business Administration (DBA) there is a specific pathway blackboard site. Each student is also registered on the Graduate School blackboard site for generic information.

The postgraduate research assessment regulations are publically available on the academic regulations pages of the university's website.

Principle 2: The research environment is supportive and inclusive for all research students.

All supervisors are research-active, and the University has a long-established and successful environment that provides support for doing and learning about research, evidenced by its relatively high completion rates.

Students are required to undergo a wide training and development programme. Within the University, the “transferable/professional skills” Research Skills Development Programme is coordinated by the University Graduate School. The “discipline specific” skills are provided within the relevant Institute or Research Centre. Our comprehensive research-training programme aligns with the Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF). Students use the RDF planner for the identification of skills development and needs, and to articulate the actions needed to facilitate the necessary skills development.

Our Research Skills Development Programme sessions run from October to June. The sessions are held using video-conferencing for ease of access.

Each July a 2-week *Doctoral Summer School* is held. The summer school includes the *Research Student Conference* for students to present their work in progress. The research skills development programme provides opportunities for research students to mix across disciplinary boundaries and encourages the development of peer support networks. A virtual learning environment aligned to the RDF supports the programme. Training on ethics is a mandatory component of the research skills development programme.

The University provides an induction programme for all new research students, which includes orientation information, details of relevant University procedures. It is designed to clarify expectations on such things as submission time, quality of research, support available to students, and amount and type of supervision. This induction is supported by comprehensive provision of research training opportunities aligned with the [Researcher Development Framework](#).

Our research skills development programme is supported by extensive online materials, offering access to part-time students and those studying away from Cumbria as well as to students who are studying at Cumbria. Students are made aware of the mechanisms for raising concerns or issues.

Principle 3: Supervisors are appropriately skilled and supported.

Our doctoral supervisors are active in research and knowledge exchange, with knowledge of the student's research area and/or the theoretical approach to be applied. The lead supervisors will have experience of research at doctoral level. This process is outlined in the University's *Research Degree Supervision & Supervisory Teams: Eligibility Criteria*.

The lead supervisor is expected to ensure that supervision can be provided and maintained during any periods of study leave or absence by supervisor(s), or time spent abroad by the student. The University, with assistance from the lead supervisor, will take steps to safeguard appropriate provision (including, where necessary, providing help in exploring the transfer of the student to another institution) in the event of the supervisor(s) leaving the University and there being no other appropriate supervisor readily available.

The Head of the Graduate School will ensure that supervisors have the training and support they require to undertake effective supervision, through the Graduate School programme. This support might include recommending a supervisor to attend training courses, conferences, etc., teaching relief or adjustment of other responsibilities.

Principle 4: Research students are afforded opportunities for professional development.

Academic Institutes are expected to ensure that each student's development needs (including research training, discipline-specific training, and broader generic skills) are identified and agreed jointly by the student and lead supervisor, initially during the student's induction period. The student's development needs will be reviewed at least annually during the research programme (as part of the periodic appraisal process).

Opportunities for students to acquire generic and transferable skills are provided through the Research Skills Development Programme, annual Research Student Conference, other events and through Research Centres & Institutes research seminars. The Research Skills Development Programme covers the material topics suggested by the [Vitae RDF](#).

A range of other pertinent topics is covered in a three-year cycle. This provides an opportunity for research students, novice supervisors and experienced supervisors from a wide range of academic disciplines to meet for discussion. The research degree Doctoral Summer School takes place annually. Other opportunities to develop research and other skills arise through the places of employment of many part-time students, and through participation in conferences and learned society meetings organised through supervisory teams.

Some research students may wish to undertake teaching as part of their skills development. The University recognises that research students are a valuable asset to teaching and research projects,

to which they can bring their specialist knowledge and research training. They can make a valuable contribution in providing research-connected teaching.

It is acknowledged that not all students wish to teach, so training to teach and teaching itself is not compulsory. Teaching experience is particularly valuable for the career development of those who wish to enter an academic career. It must be emphasised however, that:

- The university has a duty of care to students and to ensure the quality of teaching only suitably qualified and trained doctoral students will be offered teaching opportunities.
- The scope for teaching by doctoral students varies between different Institutes and teaching opportunities will not always be available.
- If research students have teaching duties, the academic Institute is expected to require them to undertake appropriate training, as outlined in the *Teaching Opportunities for Doctoral Students*, and to give them adequate instruction in the use of teaching equipment. Supervisors must ensure that all students are aware of safe operational procedures particularly when using specialist equipment and techniques.

All research students are expected to undertake a skills audit (using the RDF) with their supervisors to discern their needs and the time necessary for the required skills development. The University uses the Researcher Development Framework (RDF) for the identification of skills development and needs, and to articulate the actions needed to facilitate the necessary skills development. Doctoral researchers share their Action Plans with lead supervisors whose responsibility is to advise courses of action (for example in relation to specific skill development within the subject) and to advise the Graduate School administrator of a specific need which can be addressed through the research skills development programme and/or summer school.

The Graduate School administrator will also advise on the availability of external opportunities. Supervisors are expected to make themselves familiar with the resources available, especially on-line, as generated by suitable external agencies, as well as those (such as Blackboard) which are available internally.

Each research student is expected to have completed appropriate development activities as a condition of transfer from Probationary PhD to confirmed PhD status.

Supervisors are expected to encourage students to present their work at staff and graduate seminars, and especially at the annual Research Student Conference and university events and conferences.

Principle 5: Progression monitoring is clearly defined and operated.

The normal process is for all students to be appraised annually based on a presentation to their supervisory team and completion by both student and lead supervisor of the annual appraisal form, the contents of which should be mutually shared. These forms are returned to the Graduate School

administrator. Supervisory teams are responsible for carrying out the assessment of students' progress annually. The assessment should include a recommendation as to whether the student should be allowed to progress. The student should be told about the outcome of the assessment.

If progress or the standard of work is considered below that generally expected, the student should be given feedback on how matters might be improved including guidance on where to seek support from within the University if this is required in addition to that provided by supervisors. In some cases, it will be appropriate for the review meeting to include the Head of the Graduate School.

If the progress continues to be unsatisfactory, the student will be given a written notification that unless certain targets are achieved satisfactorily by a specified date the student will be referred to the relevant Committee with a recommendation that the student's registration be terminated. Forms of record keeping including the use of the RDF as a research skills log have been incorporated into the personal development portfolio (PDPs).

The Graduate School administrator advises research students and reminds supervisors annually of the need to keep appropriate records of the outcomes of meetings and related activities. The administrator will also put in place necessary arrangements for the transfer/confirmation and viva panels.

Doctoral researchers, for various reasons, may need to seek an intercalation of studies for a period of time, such intercalations, should first be discussed with the lead supervisor and subsequently with the Head of the Graduate School who will approve a designated period of intercalation. Further information on this will be found in the *Research Degrees Handbook*. Intercalations should not normally be requested to begin retrospectively.

Principle 6: Higher education providers offer clear guidance and processes on assessment for research degrees.

The University's regulations for postgraduate research degrees are contained as part of the [Postgraduate Research Assessment Regulations](#), and are made available to research students, staff and examiners. The regulations include information about admissions procedures, supervision arrangements, support structures, progression, assessment, complaints and appeals processes.

The University of Cumbria **Research Degrees Handbook** (s) are made available to students, staff and supervisors. In addition, a set of Good Practice Guides for Supervisors are made available and considered at supervisor training each academic year. In addition to this Postgraduate Research Code of Practice the University of Cumbria has a University Code for Research that incorporates the [UK Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers](#).

Each research student is entitled to receive an appropriate amount and type of supervision (to give them a realistic prospect of successful completion), to expect an appropriate research environment in which to work (including access to training opportunities, seminars and academic discussions),

and to have access to appropriate facilities. The precise nature of each of these varies from institute to institute.

Research centres, and institutes will ensure that students have adequate facilities for them to carry out their work effectively. All researchers have access to the Postgraduate Research Study rooms at Carlisle Fusehill Street, Ambleside and Lancaster campuses, where health and safety permits. Special arrangements must be made where equipment breakdown or a shortage of specialised equipment causes delay to the student, and the institute should attempt to minimise such disruption.

Responsibilities and any entitlements of students are clearly described in the *Research Degrees Handbook*, and on the VLE blackboard sites.

The Postgraduate Research Assessment Regulations define the assessment procedures for the award of research degrees, which are operated rigorously, fairly and consistently, include input from at least one external examiner and one internal examiner, and are carried out to a reasonable timescale. These are restated clearly in the *Research Degrees Handbook* and in the *Examining Research Students: Good Practice Guide*.

Support for students in preparing for the viva is provided through the research skills development programme offered by the Graduate School. Meetings of supervisory teams, linked to the periodic appraisal process, will also prepare students for the experience of the viva.