

UNIVERSITY OF CUMBRIA

Procedures and Processes for the Approval of new Research Degrees Provision

Academic Registry

NB. This document is available on the University of Cumbria website and it should be noted that any printed copies are uncontrolled and cannot be guaranteed to constitute the current version of the policy.

POLICY SCHEDULE	
Policy title	Procedures and Processes for the Approval of new Research Degrees Provision
Policy owner	Alice Helm-Alabaster
Policy lead contact	Alice Helm-Alabaster
Approving body	Academic Board
Date of approval	June 2025
Date of implementation	September 2025
Version no.	2
Summary of changes since the previous version	<p>Last approved November 2018</p> <p>(SSQAC approved 2-year extension for review in May 2023, revised process presented to SSQAC for approval in May 2025)</p>
Related Guidelines, Procedures, Codes of Practice etc.	<p>Programme Initiation Processes</p> <p>Postgraduate Research Code of Practice</p> <p>Code of Practice for Research</p> <p>Research Ethics Policy</p> <p>Eligibility Criteria for Research Degree</p> <p>Supervision and Supervisory Teams</p> <p>Research Degrees Handbook</p> <p>Good Practice Guides:</p> <p>Interviewing Research Students Supervising Research Students</p>

	Monitoring and Assessing Research Students Examining Research Students Brief Guides: PhD by Published Work PhD by Alternative Format PhD by Art Practice
Review interval	5 yearly

Procedure

The purpose of this procedure is to set out the requirements and processes for the approval of new research degree programmes.

The principal objective of the research degree programme approval procedure is to ensure that any new research degree programme for the University of Cumbria will be able to accept suitably qualified research students into an environment that provides support for doing and learning about research, and where excellent research, recognised by the relevant subject community, is occurring. This is in accordance with [Advice and Guidance for Research Degrees](#) from the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

Programme Initiation for Research Degree programmes

Programme initiation for Research degrees is only used for Credit Bearing Research degrees (MRes/DBA), please see the Validation Guide for more information on taking any credit bearing programme through PI and Validation. Any new PhDs will complete appropriate sections of PI.

Programme Validation approval for Research Degree programmes

The Head of the Graduate School or a member of the Graduate School's research active staff proposing the new research degree programme is designated the "Programme Leader". The Programme Leader is required to write and submit documentation that will be scrutinised and discussed at a research degree validation event.

The purpose of the documentation is to demonstrate and provide evidence of a strong and supportive research environment. This will be achieved through the submission of documentation that will cover information as shown below (see appendix 1):

Sourced from the completed Programme Initiation documentation

- programme title (s)
- rationale
- market research, competitor analysis and target intake
- entry requirements
- resource implications

Prepared for the validation review event

- structure and training
- research environment
- supporting the research student
- external mapping
- collaborative arrangements, if applicable
- recruitment procedures
- equality, diversity and inclusion procedures

A copy of the research student handbook will also be required as a part of the submission documentation.

The Validation Event

The administration for the validation event will be supported by Quality and Standards.

The Programme Leader, supported by staff who will undertake supervisory roles, are required to attend the validation event to discuss the documentation and any other relevant material. This is a collegial and supportive event with a focus on providing help and guidance so that the research degree programme can run successfully.

In addition to the Programme Leader and supervisors, there will be a Panel at the validation event comprising of:

- A Chair who will be either the Pro Vice Chancellor (Research) or a member of the Graduate School Sub-Committee
- An internal panel member, drawn from the Institute Research Leads, who will have experience of supervision and examination at doctoral level
- A student representative registered on a postgraduate research degree
- A member of Quality and Standards (who will also act as secretary for the review meeting)
- An appointed external assessor or, if they cannot attend in person, their written report for inclusion at this stage

The role of the external assessor

Prior to the validation event taking place, the documentation will be sent to an external assessor for comment. The external assessor will be asked to provide comments within 10 working days of the documentation being dispatched. The external assessor's comments will be used to inform the validation review event.

The external assessor provides an impartial, external viewpoint on the programme which is intended to enhance the quality of the doctoral programme. In order to achieve this, the external assessor will be responsible for:

- reviewing all documentation submitted for a new research degree programme
- providing feedback on the documentation
- highlighting any issues that the programme team should address
- identifying any areas of good practice

The external assessor does not need to be a subject expert in the area of the doctoral degree being proposed but will be required to meet the following criteria for appointment:

- experience of working with and managing doctoral provision in the UK
- familiarity with UK frameworks governing postgraduate research provision in the UK
- not have a close professional (e.g. co-authoring of papers, research collaboration), contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student of the University
- not have any other potential conflict of interest
- be eligible to work in the UK
- inform the University of any changes to circumstance during their appointed period which may affect impartiality for assessment

Following the validation event, a short report will be written summarising any conditions that the Programme Leader must fulfil before the new research degree is recommended for approval. Enhancements may also be made. The Panel may also reject a proposal for a new programme with clear reasons why the programme has been rejected.

Once any conditions have been fulfilled to the satisfaction of the Panel, the member of Quality and Standards will arrange for the documents to be submitted to the Student Success and Quality Committee for final endorsement/approval.

Appendix 1

Full Validation Committee, Postgraduate Research Degree approval Panel Member Report

The Validation Process is one of the key mechanisms in the setting of appropriate academic standards for the University's awards.

We ask you to provide written advice to enable the Programme Team to develop and improve the proposal further, and to attend a Validation Event to discuss the proposal with the Programme Team and test the thinking and strategies that underpin it.

Written advice which relates to the prompts on the attached template is especially helpful. Please frame your advice in the context of the stated rationale for the programme as well as a range of relevant external reference points such as the [QAA FHEQ level 8 descriptors](#) and [Doctoral Characteristics document](#).

It is requested that you forward a copy of this completed report to the Validation Officer by the deadline stated below to enable the Validation Officer and Validation Chair to identify the issues that need to be discussed and to set an agenda for the meeting.

When providing responses, please write in full sentences wherever possible so that these may be transposed directly onto the agenda. You will be expected to speak to your own comments and ask your own questions within the Validation Event.

Please return your comments to:
Deadline for comments:

The University values your input into the validation of this proposal and is grateful for your help and support.

Panel Member

Issues for discussion at the Full Validation Committee

Your Name:	
Proposal Name:	
Date:	

Programme Title Research Degrees: <ul style="list-style-type: none">
Rationale The application for our own research degree awarding powers is in progress and therefore we will require our own research degrees to be validated. Within our portfolio, there has been a growing interest in our research degrees.
Market research, competitor analysis and target intake

Panel member comments Please do not feel you have to comment about each item.	
1	Entry Requirements & Arrangements including IELTS <i>Consider the following points:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Does the documentation make reference to the University's Admissions Policy? Do you feel that the proposed programmes are in line with the expectations of this policy?</i> <i>Are the entry requirements and admission arrangements appropriate to the award?</i> <i>Do the entry requirements encourage inclusivity from a range of backgrounds and pathways to the programme?</i> <i>Are the entry requirements and admission arrangements designed to promote access by international students?</i>
2	Learning Resources, <i>Consider the following points:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>What are the eligibility requirements of supervisors?</i> <i>Is there the supervisory capacity to take on research students?</i> <i>Do the academic team members have the appropriate learning and teaching qualifications and expertise?</i> <i>Is there a demonstrated understanding of the differing demands of the programmes being proposed?</i> <i>Is there appropriate general and specialist library materials, accommodation and equipment available?</i> <i>Are learning resources accessible across different learning contexts, including where students have special needs?</i>

3	<p>Mapping of the programme against the QAA FHEQ level 8 descriptors and Doctoral Characteristics document, including specified learning outcomes</p> <p><i>Consider the following points:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Is the panel satisfied that the programmes align fully?</i>
4	<p>Structure and Training</p> <p><i>Consider the following points:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Are the programmes structured to ensure that they meet the requirements of the PgR Regulations and the Code of practice for research degrees?</i> <i>Is the training available in keeping with best practice across the sector, and as outlined in the PGR New Deal?</i>
5	<p>Programme Learning Outcomes</p> <p><i>Consider the following points:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Are all the programme outcomes appropriate?</i> <i>Do the programmes ensure any discipline-specific training and generic skills training a student might need can be accessed?</i> <i>Have the programmes been designed with the promotion of equality and widening participation in mind?</i> <i>Do the programmes recognise different types of students (full- time and part-time) and how the programmes are offered to them effectively?</i>
6	<p>How the programme contributes to and supports the research environment</p> <p><i>Consider the following points:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Is there an active culture of research activity, e.g. peer reviewed publications, successful acquisition of research funding, knowledge exchange and impacts, REF output?</i> <i>Are students provided with opportunities to work with researchers at the highest level and exchange ideas with people and organisations?</i> <i>Are students given sufficient access to academic staff for support and guidance?</i> <i>Is there a critical mass of students to enable the sharing of ideas and peer support networks?</i> <i>Do students have adequate access to learning tools such as IT equipment, literature, specialist equipment and working space?</i> <i>Are there sufficient opportunities for students to attend seminars and present their work?</i>
7	<p>Support and guidance for the research student</p> <p><i>Consider the following points:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Is there a suitable pool of academic colleagues who can take</i>

	<p><i>on supervisory roles to research students?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Are there any scholarships that may be available to research students, such as institutional scholarships?</i> • <i>In addition to the PRES, are there mechanisms to ensure that student feedback can be captured and responded to and are these sufficient?</i> • <i>Is there an appropriate strategy for academic and pastoral support?</i> • <i>Is student support accessible via a range of media meeting the needs of blended, distance, online and flexible learning students?</i>
8	<p>Quality Management and Enhancement</p> <p><i>Consider the following points:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Is the information presented sufficiently clear, including supervisory commitment and student support, particularly noting that the final programme information will be available on the UoC website as part of the University published information about our programmes?</i> • <i>Are ongoing quality management and enhancement arrangements in line with the University's Quality Assurance procedures?</i> • <i>Does the documentation indicate how students will be engaged in the ongoing evaluation and development of the programme?</i>
10	Areas of Good Practice to Note

Please list any housekeeping and documentary issues identified			
	Document	Page Number / Section	Detail of amendment required