07.2

PROCEDURE FOR THE PERIODIC REVIEW OF RESEARCH DEGREES

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CARDIFF METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

PROCEDURE GOVERNING THE REVIEW OF RESEARCH DEGREES

1.   Introduction

1.1   This section sets out the procedure for the review of the research degrees, including Doctor of Philosophy and Master of Philosophy by research (PhD/MPhil), Taught Doctorate and Professional Doctorate. It takes cognisance of the generality of the review procedure for undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes in Vol 2, Section 06.2, but takes cognisance of the particular context of research degrees.

1.2   Review will normally be on a five-year cycle.

1.3   For the purposes of this procedure, the term 'School' encompasses the University's academic Schools, The Centre for Product Design and Development Research and any collaborative partner that had been approved to deliver research degrees which lead to an award of the University. In such cases, in addition to this procedure, the University's procedures for the selection, approval, monitoring and review of collaborative provision also apply.

1.4   For the purposes of this procedure, the term 'Submission Coordinator' refers to the nominee of the University's Director of Research, who is responsible for coordinating the submission document and managing the defence of the research degree programmes at review. The term 'Submission Team' refers to University staff participating in the production and defence of the submission document and led by the Submission Coordinator. The 'Submission Team' would normally include the University Director and Deputy Director of Research, the Chair of the University Research Degrees Group, the Chairs of the School Research Degrees Committees, the Schools' Director/Associate Dean Research and representatives of Schools' Directors of Studies and Supervisors.

1.5   For the purposes of this procedure, the term 'Review Panel' refers to those appointed according to the University's Programme Approval Standing Panel procedure duly adapted for the research degree context, to conduct the review scrutiny and to make recommendations to AQSC.

2.   Authority

2.1   Through its research degree awarding powers, the University has responsibility for the quality assurance and enhancement of its research degree programmes.

2.2   The University includes its PhD/MPhil programme along with the Taught Doctorate and Professional Doctorate programmes within its portfolio of research degrees, the last two programmes hereafter referred to as Taught Doctorates.

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2.3 If the review proposes a new University qualification, then approval should be sought prior to the review using the following procedure in the Academic Handbook: Vol 1, Section 14.2 - Approval of New Degrees.

3. Structure for Research Degrees

3.1 The following rules apply regarding the conduct of research degrees at the University:

.1 each School must have a sufficient number of suitably experienced academic members of staff who are qualified to supervise research degrees, at least half of whom must be qualified to act as Directors of Study;

.2 each School must be able to provide its research students with the facilities set down in the University's Code of Practice for Research Degrees (hereafter referred to as the University's Code of Practice);

.3 each School must adhere to all the administrative processes set down in the University's Code of Practice;

.4 each School will have a Director of Research/Associate Dean Research or equivalent, who is responsible for overseeing the admission, supervision and administration of candidates, including administration in relation to examination;

.5 each School will have a Research Degrees Committee in accordance with the University's Code of Practice.

4. Purpose of Review, Regulatory Framework and External Benchmarks

4.1 The review, taking cognisance of any proposed incorporated modifications, will seek to ensure that:

.1 standards have been maintained, that quality enhancement by virtue of taking actions on issues raised has taken place, that appropriate updates have occurred and via the correct mechanisms;

.2 the research degrees are aligned to the University's Mission, Student Engagement Strategy and Curriculum Principles, and attain appropriate levels of quality and standards;

.3 there is academic coherence across each of the research degree programmes;

.4 the student journey through the research degree programmes is sound;

.5 due cognisance has been taken of QAA and other external benchmarks as necessary;

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.6   the submission documentation is acceptable.

4.2   The regulatory framework for the review shall be the University's PhD/MPhil Regulations, Taught Doctorate Regulations and Professional Doctorate Regulations, as set out in the Academic Handbook, and due regard will also be paid to the University's Code of Practice and the Research Studies Manual.

4.3   Due account will also be taken of external benchmarks, which will include the expectation that research degrees are awarded in a research environment that provides secure academic standards for conducting research and learning about research approaches, methods, procedures and protocols. This environment should offer students the quality of opportunities and the support they need to achieve successful academic, personal and professional outcomes from their research degrees.

4.4   Due account will therefore be taken of the following external benchmarks:

.1   QAA Advice and Guidance on Research Degrees;

.2   The FHEQ Qualification Descriptor for a Doctoral Degree;

.3   The QAA Doctoral Degree Characteristics Statement and the QAA Master's Degree Characteristics Statement, especially the categories relating to research master's and specialised/advanced master's degrees.

4.5   Recommendations may be made to AQSC about the University's regulatory framework identified in Paragraph 4.2 above, if it is judged during the review that the framework needs realignment with external benchmarks, including those identified in Paragraph 4.4 above.

5.   Evaluating the Review Submission

5.1   The Review Panel is expected to have assured itself of the following when making its recommendations to AQSC:

.1   that each School has in place effective arrangements to maintain appropriate academic standards and to enhance the quality of the research degree programmes, including monitoring them against internal and external indicators that reflect the context in which they are being delivered;

.2   that each School has provided and will continue to provide an environment that provides support for doing and learning about research and where excellent research, recognised by the relevant subject community, is occurring;

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.3   that each School has evidenced effective and adequate management and administration, adequate and well deployed human, physical and virtual resources and appropriate systems for quality assurance;

.4   that each School's research activity is evidently of an appropriate quality and standard to support research at the doctoral level. The following are examples of supporting evidence to be presented for review:

    i)   that its history of research activity, evidence of research culture and proposals for future developments (supported by statistics) is acceptable;

    ii)   that extant detailed procedures for the registration, monitoring, supervision and assessment of doctoral students are acceptable. These will include:

        a)   admission procedures that are clear, consistently applied and demonstrate equality of opportunity, and that ensure that only appropriately qualified and prepared applicants are admitted after a decision-making process involving at least two members of staff trained in the selection and admission of research degree students;

        b)   an induction programme and student handbook that provide students with sufficient information to enable them to commence study with an understanding of the environment in which they will be working;

        c)   defined arrangements for supervision, rights and responsibilities of student and supervisor and that these are clearly communicated;

        d)   systematic and clear supervision arrangements, including the appointment of supervisors with appropriate skills and subject knowledge to support and encourage research students, a supervisory team for each student, including a main supervisor who is the clearly identified contact point, and that supervisors are afforded sufficient time to effectively discharge their responsibilities;

        e)   probationary period and progression from the MPhil to the PhD and from the taught part of a Taught Doctorate;

        f)   assessment criteria and procedures in accordance with the relevant University regulations;

        g)   assessment criteria that define academic standards and the achievements of graduates, and are clear and readily available to research students, staff and examiners;

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h)   assessment procedures that are clear, rigorous, fair and consistent, include input from an external examiner, are carried out to a reasonable timescale and are communicated clearly to students, supervisors and examiners.

iii)   that systems in place to monitor, support and review student progress (including formal and explicit progress reviews at different stages) and to obtain student feedback are clearly defined and appropriate, and that such systems are made known to students and supervisors, including the need to maintain appropriate records of the outcomes of meetings and related activities;

iv)   that independent and formal procedures for dealing with complaints and appeals are in place and promoted, and that these are fair, clear, robust and consistently applied, and that acceptable grounds for complaints and appeals are clearly defined;

v)   that appropriate student welfare and support services are in place;

vi)   that there are appropriate opportunities for research students to develop their research, personal and professional skills, that such development needs are identified at the start of the degree and regularly reviewed and updated thereafter;

vii)   that the academic staff who will supervise and manage the research degrees are sufficient in number and quality. Detailed information will be required in the following areas:

a)   list of all staff (academic, administrative and technical);

b)   CVs of supervisors, including experience of research supervision;

c)   research degrees held by staff;

d)   staff development policy and examples of current activities;

e)   experience of staff in research supervision;

f)   students currently registered or completed;

g)   student withdrawals/failure to complete;

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          h)   research degrees staff handbook.

    viii)   that the resources available or proposed are adequate in extent and quality. Attention will focus on library, information and virtual technology and research facilities;

    ix)   that a mechanism is in place to collect, review and respond appropriately to evaluations from those concerned with the research degree programmes, including individual research degree students, groups thereof and representatives, and that such evaluations are considered openly and constructively and the results appropriately communicated;

    x)   that the University's Research Degrees Group and each School's Research Degrees Committee are operating in accordance with their terms of reference and that the terms of reference remain appropriate.

.5   that the curriculum aligns with the Student Engagement Strategy and Curriculum Principles, and that any proposed deviations from the University's curriculum parameters, including those for contact hours, optional modules, credit weightings, placements, authentic assessment and modes of delivery, are supported by a robust academic case;

.6   the academic coherence of the research degrees and the appropriateness of their programme aims, learning outcomes, content, learning and teaching methodologies, and assessment strategies (including feedback to students) and the balance of assessment methods;

.7   the soundness of the student journey through the research degree programme, including the rationale linking learning outcomes, content, learning and teaching methodologies, and assessment strategies (including feedback to students) and the balance of assessment methods;

.8   that any recommendations regarding the embedding of employability through curriculum design have been taken into account;

.9   that the submission document evidences responsiveness to stakeholder feedback both internally and externally;

.10   that there is alignment with the University's requirements for different modes of learning (on-campus/blended/online);

.11   the relationship/comparability of the research degree programmes regarding any national benchmark and standards (e.g. QAA subject benchmark statement, FHEQ qualification descriptor, QAA

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Characteristics Statement, and any relevant PSRB requirements);

.12 where professional practice, work placement, etc., are incorporated, the management, support and assessment principles involved and that there is general compliance with the University's policy and guidelines for work-based and placement learning;

.13 where student exchange and other/or other forms of study away from the University, which might involve third party assessment, the management and supervision of such elements, and the methods by which both academic credit and marking/assessment levels will be assured with regards to those required by the University;

.14 in instances where online or blended learning is to be employed, the approach used, support available, the learning materials proposed and the alignment of the proposals with the University's 10 Principles of Online Learning;

.15 that any proposed changes reflect the performance of the research degrees to date and that the standards set at the introduction of the research degrees or since their last periodic review have been maintained;

.16 that quality enhancement by virtue of taking action on issues raised has taken place, that appropriate updates to the research degrees have taken place and via the correct mechanisms;

.17 the quality of the Student Programme Handbook and learning platform;

.18 arrangements for personal tutoring;

.19 that all required documentation for approval has been completed fully and appropriately;

5.2 In the case of research degrees franchised at a collaborative partner, the Review Panel will also seek to ensure themselves that:

.1 that the management and academic staffing continue to ensure that academic standards are achieved successfully, and that the quality of provision is at a comparable level;

.2 that appropriate learning resources and student support mechanisms are in place to deliver the research degrees;

.3 that any minor changes proposed to the curriculum (e.g. to contextualise) are acceptable in terms of content, breadth and academic level.

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6. Quality Assurance of Submission Document

6.1   The Submission Coordinator and the Submission Team should engage with QED in the period leading into the submission of the review documentation regarding any re-design/development of the research degrees. Lack of engagement with QED will result in the submission being disallowed. The Submission Coordinator and the Submission Team should also consult employers, students and, if appropriate, PSRBs and any franchise partners during any re-design and re-development of the research degrees. The Review Panel, on behalf of the Academic Quality and Standards Committee, has the right to expect that the Submission Coordinator has endured thorough preparation of both the submission document and the Submission Team, including peer review of the draft submission document prior to its release to QED, which will then review the submission document prior to its release to the reviewers. Incomplete or poorly considered documents, or proposals that deviate from the University's curriculum parameters without prior approval arranged through QED, will not be considered by the reviewers.

6.2   The submission document will enable the demonstration of what has been achieved and, if appropriate, what is proposed to be achieved. Concise, explicit documentation should enable the reader readily to understand the submission and identify relevant issues. It is the responsibility of the Submission Coordinator and the Submitting Team to ensure that the submission documentation is compliant with University requirements and is of appropriate quality.

6.3   The quality of the submission document is an important element in a successful review, as this document will be the basis for critical discussion. To that end, the nature of the language used and the presentation adopted are important. The writing should be clear and precise, the language simple and jargon-free and excessive verbosity should be avoided. Diagrams, charts and hyperlinks to supporting/illustrative evidence may be used with benefit.

6.4   The submission document should be organised in such a way as to make for ease of access, referencing and reading. The various areas encompassed should be differentiated either as sub-sections of a larger document or as separate documents. The overall product should be manageable and usable. An indication of what is to be found in each document package is useful, particularly where the trailing of issues is concerned.

6.5   The Submission Coordinator and the Submission Team are responsible for producing the submission document. The submission document will be the basis for review scrutiny and therefore its quality will be of crucial importance. The Quality Enhancement Directorate must receive the submission documents for dispatch to the reviewers by the stipulated deadline and failure to observe the deadline will normally result in the postponement or cancellation of the review.

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6.6 Prior to submission to QED, the Submission Coordinator is responsible for ensuring the following measures have been taken:

.1 the form, content and quality of the submission document complies with University requirements, including those of the Submission Checklist (Volume 2, Section 1.2 of the Academic Handbook refers);

.2 there is ownership of the submission document by the Submission Team and the Schools that will defend it at review;

.3 the resources needed to deliver the research degrees are and will continue to be available, and in the case of any proposed changes, will be made available; if appropriate, that any servicing required from all participating Schools will continue to be available and, in the case of any proposed changes, is properly organised and will be available for the lifespan of the research degrees;

.4 the design of the research degrees complies with the University's Curriculum Principles, relevant academic regulations, structural framework and curriculum parameters and has taken account of the programme design process and any consultation with External Advisors, Student Advisors, Industry Advisors, employers, students and any franchise partners;

.5 the research degrees programmes incorporate the University's statutory requirements, for example, in regard to assessment regulations and skills development, etc., including the number of re-assessment attempts (1 or 2) for the research degrees;

.6 the research degree programmes, their delivery and management incorporate and are aligned with the requirements of any relevant external benchmarks, including QAA Advice and Guidance for Research Degrees, the FHEQ Level 8 and, as appropriate, Level 7 Qualification Descriptor, QAA Doctoral Degree Characteristics and Research Master's Degree Characteristics, and the benchmarks of any relevant PSRBs;

.7 the research degree programmes incorporate the University's desired policy direction and EDGE, as outlined in the extant Corporate Strategic Plan and strategies such as the Student Engagement Strategy associated with learning, teaching, assessment and research;

.8 the pedagogic and resource implications of adopting blended or online learning have been fully considered and there is alignment with the University's '10 Principles of Online Learning';

.9 the research degree programmes endorse and demonstrate means for adopting employability skills through their learning and teaching

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strategies, and any recommendations made by the Employability Team have been addressed;

10. the research degree programmes enable students to understand, learn and benefit from research-based enquiry, particularly that which is relevant to their discipline; undertake such research; and acquire and apply research skills appropriate to their level and discipline.

6.7 On receiving the draft submission document by the stipulated deadline, QED will arrange initial scrutiny to ascertain that the document is compliant with requirements (structural, regulatory, etc.) and, where necessary, will inform the Review Panel of any areas in need of further development. Consequent recommendations for changes will be passed via QED to the Submission Coordinator and Submitting Team for consideration prior to their submission of revised documentation for final academic approval.

6.8 In instances where the submission document is deemed unsatisfactory, the QED Quality Operations Manager will require the review to be postponed or cancelled.

7. <u>Information to be Included in the Submission Document</u>

7.1 The following documentation should be included in the submission document:

.1 a Self-Evaluation Document for which the Submission Coordinator will be the lead author. The SED should include the rationale and detail of any proposed modifications, including evidence of approval-in-principle by the external examiner. The format of the SED will be discussed between the Submission Coordinator and the QED's Head of Quality Operations and will be approved by the latter. It will take into account the generalities of the guidance and template contained in the Academic Handbook (Appendix 1 of Volume 2, Section 06.2).

.2 the Programme Document, incorporating programme specifications and module descriptors, updated with any proposed modifications (see also .5 below). The Programme Document should include:

i) a brief historical background to the research degree programmes with particular reference to their development;

ii) a history of each School's research activity, evidence of their research culture and proposals for future development;

iii) reference to any external and internal reports on the quality of the research degrees, including any references to them in the most recent Quality Enhancement Review by the QAA, and a self-appraisal regarding these;

iv) academic and management structure;

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v)   technician and administrative support services;

vi)   intake, admission requirements and selection procedure;

vii)   induction programme;

viii)   arrangements for supervision, rights and responsibilities of supervisor and student;

ix)   probationary period and progression from MPhil to PhD and taught parts of the Taught Doctorate programmes;

x)   assessment criteria and procedures (in accordance with relevant University regulations);

xi)   arrangements in place for University Research Degrees Group and School Research Degrees Committees;

xii)   systems in place to monitor, support and review student progress and to obtain student feedback;

xiii)   services for student welfare and support;

xiv)   procedures for dealing with complaints and appeals;

xv)   opportunities for students to develop research, personal and professional skills;

xvi)   the resources available, in particular:

   a)   Library

        Details of the current stock, including journals and electronic access, opening hours, annual budgets, acquisition policy, lending rights at local and other universities and institutions.

   b)   Information Technology

        Information technology provision, budget and access.

   c)   Research Facilities and Environment

        Listing of accommodation available for research and study, tutorial and seminar facilities.

xvii)   Mechanism for collecting, reviewing and responding to evaluation.

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.3 Curriculum Vitae and detailed information on the academic staff who teach, supervise and manage the research degree programmes, including:

  i) list of all staff (academic, administrative and technical);

  ii) CVs of supervisors;

  iii) research degrees held by staff;

  iv) staff development policy and examples of current activities;

  v) experience of staff in research supervision;

  vi) students currently registered or completed;

  vii) student withdrawals/failure to complete;

  viii) research degrees staff handbook;

  ix) induction programme and current Student Programme Handbook.

.4 annual graduate studies report for last two years and external examiner/verifier reports for last two years;

.5 the programme specifications and appendices* and module descriptors updated with any proposed changes; core modules for which failure by students cannot be compensated must be identified. Templates and guidance for programme specifications and module descriptors are available in the [Academic Handbook](#).

  *such appendices include mappings referred to in the programme specification, for example:

  i) programme learning outcomes and modules;

  ii) assessment methods, learning and teaching strategies and modules;

  iii) programme and module learning outcomes to relevant benchmark statements (QAA subject benchmark statements, FHEQ qualification descriptors, any relevant PSRB requirements).

.6 minutes of the University Research Degrees Group and School Research Degrees Committees for the last two years;

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.7   University Code of Practice for Research Degrees;

.8   Research Studies Manual;

.9   Validation report or report of last review;

.10   Copies of any external reports on the research degree programmes that refer to the period in question, including any external review by the QAA such as Quality Enhancement Review;

.11   Appropriate evidence that past changes to the research degree programmes have taken place through the correct mechanism;

.12   If collaborative provision, moderators' reports for the last two years and authorised memorandum of programme and financial agreement, if applicable.

.13   Any other relevant documents/reports;

.14   Access for the reviewers to the programme learning platform;

.15   A copy of the Race Equality reflection exercise undertaken by the Submission Team.

N.B.   the Submission Coordinator and the Submission Team should ensure that if the submission is in whole or part in Welsh, that English translations are included.

7.2   In addition to the above, a sample of Annual Student Reports and student work such as posters and theses, examination examples, assignments, etc., should be made available during the review process.

8.   **Formulation of Review Recommendations**

8.1   Recommendations to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee for the continuation of approval should not normally be made if the Reviewer Panel retains major reservations about the way any or all of the research degrees have operated since validation or the previous review, about the standards achieved or about the staffing and resources associated with the programmes.

8.2   The situation that causes most difficulty arises where the document is deficient but where any reservations have been satisfied in discussion. In such cases, the reviewers must be satisfied that the issues have been or can be resolved and that the documentation will be amended accordingly.

8.3   The following may be recommended:

.1   that any or all of the research degrees be approved to continue (with or without proposed modifications);

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.2   that the research degrees be approved subject to minor changes to the documentation;

.3   that any or all of the research degrees be approved to continue (with or without proposed modifications) subject to ongoing monitoring by AQSC. In the case of resource issues, including staff issues, this may result in a requirement for an action plan, to be monitored by AQSC;

.4   that any or all of the research degrees be not approved to continue but resubmitted after a process of further development or re-design;

.5   that any or all of the research degrees be closed, on the grounds that neither the application of changes nor further development would result in a programme of appropriate quality or standard.

8.4   In the case of recommendation 1, 2 or 3 above, AQSC will be advised to approve the continuation of any or all of the research degrees (following, where applicable, the completion of any minor changes or an appropriate action plan). In the case of recommendation 5, the outcome will be reported to the Portfolio Development Committee.

9.   **Administration of the Review**

9.1   The administration of the review will be under the auspices of the Quality Enhancement Directorate and will, in general, follow the steps laid out in Volume 2, Section 06.2 of the Academic Handbook – *Periodic and Elective Review of Existing Programmes*, with appropriate adjustments agreed by the Chair of AQSC on the recommendation of QED's Head of Quality Operations. These steps will include:

.1   the conduct of the review by a suitably qualified and experienced Programme Approval Standing Panel;

.2   the facilitation and recording of the review by QED;

.3   the logistics and timeline for the review, including the initial scrutiny of the draft submission document by QED and feedback to the Submission Coordinator and the Submitting Team;

.4   the submission of the definitive programme document as a PDF to QED by the Submission Coordinator, once the outcome of the review has been approved by AQSC. The definitive programme document will thereafter serve as the University's source of information about the reviewed research degrees.

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