

Nottingham Trent University Research Student Environment

Context

At NTU 'we create strong relationships that enable discovery, drive innovation, and change both the world and ourselves' (NTU Strategic Plan). We have committed to expand further our research excellence across the disciplinary breadth of our academic schools and through the development of challenge-led research associated with five NTU Strategic Research Themes: Health and Wellbeing; Medical Technologies and Advanced Materials; Safety and Security of Citizens and Society; Sustainable Futures; and Global Heritage: Science, Development and Management. Integral to the achievement of our research ambitions is a commitment to focus on the development of the next generation of researchers and our existing research staff.

NTU recognises the importance of the postgraduate community in the pursuit of research excellence and impact. We have a community of over 760 research students whose research aligns with the specialist areas of research that our academic and research staff pursue, in both established and emerging areas. Our practice shows commitment to the Research Integrity Concordat, the requirements of our many public, private and charity funders and the Quality Assurance Agency Quality Code for Higher Education, Chapter B11: Research Degrees.

In association with the NTU Code of Practice for Research Degrees, this document lays out what an NTU research student can expect of the postgraduate research environment.

1. The role of the NTU academic schools in research provision

For each research student, the discipline expertise, experienced supervisory team and, if relevant, specialist infrastructure, resides within one or more of the eight academic schools of NTU. During the research student journey, most time will be spent in association with the research environment of these schools. The University and the academic schools recognise and promote the importance of interdisciplinary research where appropriate.

Specifically, each of the eight academic schools:

- (a) Develops, implements and evaluates a Research and Innovation Plan which has been devised to support the development and delivery of quality research within the school, including that which is of internationally leading. Each plan will include a section describing the school's ambitions relating to research students. In addition, from 2018 all Associate Deans for Research will, through their School Research Committees, ensure that all the activities which have been agreed by the NTU Academic Board and which support an inclusive and developmentally focussed School Research Environment will be implemented. Research students will be at the heart of these research environments. Members of the University Executive Team and the Head of the NTU Doctoral School will regularly monitor the outcomes of these plans;
- (b) Oversees, in partnership with the Doctoral School, and through the Associate Deans for Research, dedicated Postgraduate Research Tutors and Professional Doctorate Course Leaders, the appointment of appropriate supervisory teams consisting of trained and experienced research-active or, where appropriate, practice-active or practice-experienced supervisors;
- (c) Provides opportunities for research students to participate in, and utilise the facilities and assets of, relevant NTU research groups and centres that are critical to the support of enquiry and collaboration for both staff and research students; and
- (d) Seeks to provide opportunities for research students to participate in, and present their research to, conferences, seminars and workshops organised by academic schools, by the Doctoral School, by individual research groups or Centres, or external to NTU.

The research community in the academic schools not only supports the practice of research but also provides links to a whole range of activities that broaden the student experience. This includes, for example, training workshops and seminars throughout the academic year across NTU and the University's Distinguished Lecture series in which leading figures talk about their life and work. Research students may also be encouraged to become involved in the organisation of School Research Conferences, as well as presenting their research work through posters, exhibitions, multi-media formats or as oral presentations at such events.

The research training programme for MPhil and PhD students and the Professional Doctorate workshops co-ordinated by the Doctoral School give research students the opportunity to discuss their work with other students and academics, both formally and informally. Close engagement with the broader research community within an academic school provides research students with an insight into the various academic researcher career routes that may be open to them. Further relevant support from supervisors, Organisational Development and the Employability Team may enable them to take the early steps into postdoctoral and other early career research posts or, in the case of Professional Doctorate students, enhance further professional practice and advancement.

2. NTU oversight of research quality and the enhancement of student experience

The progression of individual research students is carefully monitored at pre-determined stages during the course of their research programme. This is achieved through a partnership between the academic schools, the Doctoral School and a range of formal committees. Student representatives participate in some of these formal committees, reflecting their important role in decision-making about the postgraduate research environment and community. In addition, quality initiatives within academic schools may include the involvement of research students.

College Research Degrees Committees monitor research student progression from the initial approval of the research project, through transfer from MPhil and PhD and other major stages of MPhil and PhD degrees, including approval of examination arrangements. The monitoring for Professional Doctorate students is provided through meetings of dedicated course committees and progression boards.

The University Research Degrees Committee receives, scrutinises and monitors the minutes and actions of the College Research Degree Committees, Professional Doctorate Course Committees and progression boards. It acts in an advisory capacity as required by the committees. On behalf of the University Research Committee and Academic Board, it also maintains oversight of the overall standards of research provision, and carefully monitors and supports the development of initiatives that enhance the research student experience. The University Research Degrees Committee also maintains oversight of the quality management and enhancement processes with collaborative partners.

The University Research Degrees Committee is the guardian for NTU research degree regulations, keeping them under regular review and further developing them for ultimate approval by Academic Board.

These bodies meet regularly throughout each academic year. They report directly through the University Research Committee to Academic Board, and are constituted to support both strategic planning and monitoring, and the effective mobilisation of resources from the academic schools and a range of relevant professional support services, including the library.

The work of all Research Degrees Committees is informed by the regular use of a range of relevant internal and external benchmarks, input from research student representatives and from the results of surveys, e.g. the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey. This helps to ensure the quality of the research student experience.

The major areas of focus at University Research Degrees Committee level, in terms of oversight of the management of research degrees and of the enhancement of the research student experience, are:

- (a) Enquiries and admissions; which are dealt with centrally based upon recommendations from the Schools following interviews with candidates.
- (b) The appointment of suitably qualified supervisory teams following NTU policy and procedures laid down in the regulations.
- (c) Student progression:
 - i. MPhil and PhD - Project approval, annual and interim monitoring, transfers from MPhil and PhD registration and through to submission; and
 - ii. Professional doctorates - progression through phase one to submission of the thesis at phase two.
- (d) The training for research students, informed by the VITAE Researcher Development Framework, in support of the further development of research and professional skills.
- (e) Examination processes, including pre-viva assessments for professional doctorates and the viva examination process including the appointment of examiners and independent chairs, arrangement of vivas and dealing with post-viva arrangements.

In addition, the University Research Degrees Committee supports the development and approval of a range of guidance for research students, eg:

- (f) Information about the ethical review processes necessary for the pursuit of research, both in generic and specific terms;
- (g) Information on avoidance of research misconduct, including plagiarism and infringements of intellectual property rights, and processes for dealing with such issues; and
- (h) Handbooks of advice and instruction for research students and supervisors.

The Doctoral School Forum, which meets on a termly basis, provides all research students with an opportunity to:

- (a) Work in partnership to discuss ideas from students or staff about the learning experience, communications or other aspects of being a student within the School;
- (b) Discuss learning and teaching practices, resources or facilities;
- (c) Work jointly on items that contribute to student engagement or community building with the school;
- (d) Consult about new institutional initiatives;
- (e) Communicate suggested improvements to other University departments (for example the library, Student Support Services or Estates); and
- (f) Receive feedback about issues arising at course level, normally only when they impact across the schools, and considering strategies for resolving them.

3. Research student support and training

NTU aims to provide a broad range of opportunities for research students to develop their research, personal and professional skills. In addition to the work done in these areas within supervisory teams, this is achieved through a combination of generic and discipline-specific research development opportunities. A range of professional support areas within NTU, including the Employability Team and Organisational Development may contribute to this training. Ultimately, the training is tailored in recognition of individual research students' prior experience, their research programmes and their ambitions for future career development.

The training on offer, which is informed by the VITAE Researcher Development Framework and, when appropriate, by the requirements of a range of public and charity funders, e.g. the Research Councils, has been designed to support:

- (a) The doctoral research process generally;
- (b) The first stages of being early-career researchers;
- (c) The first stages of professional recognition for MPhil/PhD students, e.g. through the Higher Education Academy;
- (d) Contact with established researchers from a range of disciplines close to and distant from the students on the course;
- (e) The requirements of multi- and inter-disciplinary research;
- (f) Ethics, transferable skills, and personal development;
- (g) Understanding of relevant research methodologies;
- (h) For professional doctorate students, support for established practitioners in their transition into academic research; and
- (i) For professional doctorate students, tailored discussion and interaction with established researchers and peers, including research training, research ethics, research methods and methodologies.

4. Staff training

Staff involved in supervising, examining, and progression monitoring processes for research students must maintain awareness of effective practice in all these activities. In partnership with Organisational Development, the Doctoral School and partners from the academic schools design, develop and deliver:

- (a) Academic supervisor training;
- (b) Internal Examiner and Independent Chair training; and
- (c) Resources for Independent Assessors of MPhil and PhD students.

Attendance records for training courses are kept, and relevant information is annually circulated to staff eligible to undertake these roles for self-directed updating.

5. The Doctoral School Professional Support Team

The Doctoral School Professional Support Team plays an important role in supporting the development and delivery of those elements of the schools' research plans associated with research students.

The Doctoral School office, which supports all research students throughout their entire research programme, provides an essential point of contact, both physical and electronic, and is supported by a dedicated team of professional administrators.

The Doctoral School office is the repository for all research student records. The office team provides research students with access to information and a range of practical support, e.g. in dealing with external organisations, for example local authorities or the Home Office.

The Doctoral School is led by the Head of the Doctoral School who is a successful research active academic with a strong personal track record of research student supervision and successful research student outcomes:

- (a) Acts as a point for students to access those academic and professional services colleagues who are able to give appropriate advice and support;
- (b) Supports the development and delivery of induction activities that highlight and introduce the services offered by the Doctoral School and other partners at the University, such as the library, Employability Team, Organisational Development, the Students Union and Student Support Services;
- (c) Provides access to dedicated work space and IT facilities for research students, which includes access to social and break out space, to encourage networking and sharing of ideas, thus providing an inspiring learning and working environment. These spaces complement the learning spaces and resources provided in the academic schools and NTU libraries;
- (d) Relays information and details provided by the academic schools about the various seminars and workshops being staged. These include internal and external researchers and speakers in cognate and related disciplines, thus encouraging multi-/and interdisciplinary synergies and a collegiate approach to research.;
- (e) Relays information about opportunities for research students to engage with, for example:
 - i. Relevant consortia external to NTU, e.g. Doctoral Training Centres or alliances associated with different university groupings; and
 - ii. Academic conferences focussing on postgraduate research including conferences and events organised by the academic schools;
- (f) Co-delivers workshops to students from across the East Midlands Hub;
- (g) Oversees the delivery of research student training across NTU;
- (h) Provides information about Organisational Development opportunities for research students to facilitate the development of personal and employment related skills;
- (i) Liaises with the Partnerships Local Engagement and Commercial Services team to facilitate access to experiences within the non-academic business community for full-time MPhil and PhD students; and

- (j) Links through to University initiatives such as Enabling Innovation and The Hive that provide opportunities for MPhil and PhD students to apply their skills to real-time business projects.

NOTE: this document should be read in conjunction with the University's Code of Practice for Research Degrees [<https://www.ntu.ac.uk/research/doctoral-school/research-degrees>].