

# Nottingham Trent University Postgraduate Researcher 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 doctoral candidates 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 doctoral candidate can expect of the postgraduate research environment.

## 1. The role of the Academic Schools in research provision

For each doctoral candidate, 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 doctoral candidate 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 doctoral candidates. In addition, from 2018 all Associate Deans for Research, through their School Research Committees, ensure that all the activities which have been agreed by the Academic Board and which support an inclusive and developmentally focused School Research Environment will be implemented. Doctoral candidates will be at the heart of these research environments. Members of the University Executive Team and the Director of the NTU Doctoral School [and Research Operations] will regularly monitor the outcomes of these plans;
- (b) Oversees, in partnership with the NTU 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 doctoral candidates to participate in, and utilise the facilities and assets of, relevant research groups and centres that are critical to the support of enquiry and collaboration for both staff and doctoral candidates;

and

- (d) Seeks to provide opportunities for doctoral candidates to participate in, and present their research to, conferences, seminars and workshops that are organised by Academic Schools, by the NTU Doctoral School, by individual research groups or Centres, or events which are 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 doctoral candidate experience. This includes, for example, training workshops and seminars that are accessible to all postgraduate researchers throughout the academic year across NTU and the University's Distinguished Lecture series in which leading figures talk about their life and work. Doctoral candidates 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 doctoral candidates and the Professional Doctorate workshops, co-ordinated by the NTU Doctoral School, gives doctoral candidates the opportunity to discuss their work with other doctoral candidates and academics, both formally and informally. Close engagement with the broader research community within an Academic School provides doctoral candidates 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 candidates, enhance further professional practice and advancement.

## **2. NTU oversight of research quality and the enhancement of doctoral candidate experience**

The progression of individual doctoral candidates 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 NTU Doctoral School and a range of formal committees. Doctoral candidate 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 doctoral candidates.

School Research Degrees Committees monitor all doctoral candidate progression from the initial approval of the research project, throughout the journey with annual monitoring and, including approval of examination arrangements. The monitoring for Professional Doctorate candidates is provided through the School Research Degree Committees also.

The University Research Degrees Committee receives, scrutinises and monitors the minutes and actions of the School Research Degree Committees. It acts in an advisory capacity. 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 doctoral candidate 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 of 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 doctoral candidate representatives and from the results of surveys, e.g. the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey. This helps to ensure the quality of the doctoral candidate 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 doctoral candidate experience. In addition, the University Research Degrees Committee supports the development and approval of a range of guidance for doctoral candidates. Further information can be found in the University Research Degree Committee (URDC) Terms of Reference (ToRs – Section 1 of the NTU Quality Handbook).

The NTU Doctoral Community Forum, which meets on a termly basis at all three campuses where research is carried out, provides all doctoral candidates with an opportunity to:

- (a) Work in partnership to discuss ideas from doctoral candidates and staff about the learning experience, communications or other aspects of being a doctoral candidate within the Academic Schools;
- (b) Discuss learning and teaching practices, resources or facilities;
- (c) Work jointly on items that contribute to doctoral candidate engagement or doctoral community building with the Doctoral 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 that have an impact across schools and consider strategies for resolving them.

Further information can be found in the Community Forum Terms of Reference (ToRs).

### **3. Doctoral candidates' support and training**

NTU aims to provide a broad range of opportunities for doctoral candidates to develop their research, personal and professional skills. This is achieved through a combination of excellent supervision, generic skills development and discipline-specific research training. Academic schools and a range of professional support areas within NTU, including the NTU Doctoral School, the Employability Team, Research Development, Library Services and Organisational Development, contribute to this training. Ultimately, the training is tailored in recognition of individual doctoral candidates' prior experience, their research programme and their ambitions for future career development.

The training on offer has been designed to support:

- (a) Contact with established researchers from a range of disciplines close to and distant from the doctoral candidates on the course;
- (b) The requirements of multi- and inter-disciplinary research;

- (c) Responsible Research and Innovation, including ethics and integrity and, where relevant, an understanding of the expectations relating to the principles of Replacement, Reduction and Refinement within animal research;
- (d) All aspects of equality, diversity and inclusion, including mental health and well-being;
- (e) Excellent understanding of a range of relevant research methodologies, including new and emerging methodologies;
- (f) Excellent understanding of the open access agenda and requirements related to data management and security;
- (g) Public engagement, including the development of influencing skills and a clear understanding of how policy is created and implemented
- (h) Knowledge of research commercialisation and intellectual property rights;
- (i) For professional doctorate candidates, support for established practitioners in their transition into academic research; and
- (j) For professional doctorate candidates, tailored discussion and interaction with established researchers and peers.

#### **4. Staff training**

Staff involved in supervising, examining, and progression-monitoring processes for doctoral candidates must attend relevant training to ensure they remain up-to-date with policy and practice. In partnership with Organisational Development, the NTU Doctoral School and partners from the Academic Schools, design, develop and deliver:

- (a) Doctoral candidate supervisor training;
- (b) Internal Examiner and Independent Chair training; and
- (c) Resources for Independent Assessors of doctoral candidates.

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 NTU 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 doctoral candidates.

The NTU Doctoral School, which supports all doctoral candidates 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 NTU Doctoral School office is the repository for all doctoral candidate records. The office team provides doctoral candidates 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 NTU Doctoral School:

- (a) Acts as a first port of call for enquiries from doctoral candidates and works closely with academic and professional services colleagues to give appropriate advice and support;
- (b) Delivers induction activities in partnership with academic schools, the library, Employability Team, Organisational Development, the Nottingham Trent Students Union and Student Support Services;
- (c) Curates, oversees and co-delivers an annual programme of doctoral training:
  - i working with Academic Schools to identify all research seminars and workshops and to ensure a high-quality multi-disciplinary research training offer;
  - ii working with professional services, the library, Research Development, Employability Team, Organisational Development, the Nottingham Trent Students Union and Student Support Services to ensure all other training and doctoral community development needs are met.
- (d) Co-delivers workshops to doctoral candidates from across the East Midlands Doctoral Network (EMDoc);
- (e) Develops and maintains regular communication with the doctoral community through a variety of channels, ensuring:
  - i. The doctoral community is aware of all relevant opportunities to participate in external training, events and consortia e.g. (inter)national competitions, mobility funding schemes, summer schools, doctoral training alliances
  - ii. The community is able to share and celebrate successes.
- (f) Works in partnership with Communications, Admissions, Marketing and Student Recruitment directorate to ensure that strong, clear, inclusive messaging about the opportunities for doctoral education at NTU is communicated to the widest possible audience.
- (g) Works closely with colleagues from the Research Development and Knowledge Exchange Directorate and NTU Global to facilitate and support the development of collaborative doctorates, mobility opportunities and placements with international partners and with partners from business, industry and the third sector;
  - i) Provides regular, up-to-date management information related to key research degree metrics for monitoring and planning purposes

NOTE: this document should be read in conjunction with the [University's Code of Practice for Research Degrees](#)