

Section **7B**

Nottingham Trent University

Quality Handbook

**Part C: Assuring and
Enhancing Quality**

**Section 7B: Periodic
Research Degrees Review**

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1. Aims

Periodic Research Degrees Review assures the University that the Doctoral School and Academic Schools are: effectively managing quality assurance and enhancement procedures and processes for research degrees, in line with the University quality framework; and providing high quality, valid, relevant and inclusive learning opportunities that enable students to achieve the University's research degree awards and qualifications. The framework also aims to support the Doctoral and Academic Schools in the continuing evaluation and enhancement of their provision.

Requirements

- 1.1 Periodic Research Degrees Review (PRDR) covers all of the University's research degrees, both PhD and Professional Doctorates, and includes collaborative arrangements in place for these awards.
- 1.2 PRDR takes place on a five year cycle. The review cycle is set out in Quality Handbook (QH) Section 7A.
- 1.3 For the purposes of PRDR, the following sections of the QH are particularly relevant, and should be consulted as part of the process:
 - a. Section 1 and Supplement 1C;
 - b. Section 4;
 - c. Sections 10A-C;
 - d. Section 11;
 - e. Sections 17D and F.

2. Governance

Periodic Research Degrees Review is organised by the Centre for Academic Development and Quality (CADQ) on behalf of Academic Board, the Academic Standards and Quality Committee (ASQC) and University Research Committee (URC).

Requirements

- 2.1 ASQC approves the final Periodic Research Degrees Review Report on behalf of Academic Board.
- 2.2 Any changes to the Periodic Research Degrees Review process are approved by ASQC and are ratified by Academic Board.
- 2.3 URC receives details of any changes to the PRDR process and is responsible for ensuring that PRDR reports are appropriately acted upon.

3. Periodic Research Degrees Review framework

Periodic Research Degrees Review assesses the effectiveness of the Doctoral School and academic Schools' processes for the management of quality and standards, and for the enhancement of research degree students' learning opportunities. The process enables the University to undertake a broad periodic review of quality management processes, and the opportunities afforded to research degree students, beyond the routine monitoring of the effectiveness of provision which takes place via the process of annual monitoring (including external examiner reporting).

Requirements

- 3.1 Periodic Research Degrees Review focuses on two aspects:
 - a. Aspect 1: Standards and quality management;
 - b. Aspect 2: The quality and enhancement of the student learning opportunities.
- 3.2 These aspects are assessed through a number of methods:
 - a. Consideration of the Research Degrees Reflective Analysis Document, produced by the Doctoral School (in collaboration with the academic Schools) in preparation for the review (see Quality Handbook Supplement (QHS) 7F);
 - b. A compliance check undertaken by CADQ prior to the event using evidence provided by the Doctoral School/academic Schools (see QHS 7F) which determines compliance with required quality management processes, as set out the Quality Handbook;
 - c. Review of a set of evidence provided in the Electronic Repository that includes examples related to the individual student journey for PhD provision.
 - d. Discussion with key staff responsible for the quality and standards of research degrees across the University, current research degree students, and other external stakeholders, during the two day review event (see separate QHS 7F).

Explanatory notes

- Academic quality represents the effectiveness of the learning opportunities provided to the students in order for them to achieve their award.
- We are concerned here with the quality of the learning opportunities offered (in terms of, for example, teaching, supervision, learning resources, the research environment, researcher development, assessment, academic and personal support).
- Enhancement of these learning opportunities reflects strategic and deliberate steps to improve the quality of learning opportunities.
- Enhancement may be illustrated via a range of different examples of 'good practice' but PRDR is interested in the approach to planning, harnessing, evaluating and sharing such practice.
- Initial contact between CADQ and the Doctoral School is made 12 months in advance of the planned review, and the School (in collaboration with the academic Schools) is advised to start formal preparations six months before the review takes place (see QHS 7F).
- Specific guidance on each stage of the process is provided in QHS 7F.

4. Review expectations

Periodic Research Degrees Review aims to establish whether broad expectations associated with both aspects under review have been met.

Requirements

4.1 The review panel is required to make a judgement about both aspects under review using the following expectations and indicative factors in order to reach this judgement.

Aspect 1: Standards and quality management

Expectations	Factors
1. Governance and quality management processes	The effectiveness of the governance structure for maintaining the standards and quality of research degrees provision; and particularly the relationship between University and

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	<p>School committees</p> <p>Processes for the review and implementation of research degree policies and quality management processes</p> <p>Oversight of research degree processes, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriately qualified supervisory teams • Project approval, transfer and student monitoring • Periods of probation and suspension of studies • Viva voce examination teams <p>Approaches to meet the ambitions of the University's strategic plan with regards to research degrees</p> <p>The extent of shared awareness and understanding of quality management processes across all those engaged in research degrees activity</p> <p>The use of student representation in quality management and decision-making, and the support provided for students for this purpose</p>
<p>2. Effective processes are in place for the selection, admission and induction of research degree students</p>	<p>Processes for the admission of research degree students, including ensuring equal opportunities for all applicants</p> <p>The relevance and timeliness of induction for research degree students</p>
<p>3. Course design, development and approval: enables standards to be set, allows students to demonstrate learning outcomes; and meets University goals and strategies</p>	<p>The way(s) in which the Doctoral School and academic Schools ensure that professional doctorate courses, and individual programmes of study for PhD candidates are fit for purpose and current</p> <p>The use of externality to inform course design and curriculum for professional doctorate courses</p> <p>How students are engaged in the development of professional doctorate courses</p>
<p>4. Assessment practices are fair, rigorous and enable students to achieve the learning outcomes</p>	<p>How assessment tasks and schedules are designed, agreed, monitored and reviewed for phase one of Professional Doctorate courses</p> <p>The processes for marking and</p>

	<p>moderation of assessment for phase one of Professional Doctorate courses</p> <p>The rigour and soundness of processes for initial assessment of a thesis and for viva voce examinations</p> <p>How feedback on assessment and the outcome of viva voce examinations is provided to students</p> <p>How processes for assessment of students by thesis and viva voce examination are monitored and reviewed</p>
5. The use of external examiners and external benchmarking is strong and appropriate	<p>The alignment of external examiner processes and procedures to the Quality Handbook Section 9</p> <p>External examiners' contribution to the maintenance and enhancement of quality and standards</p> <p>The use of benchmarks and research council requirements to inform research degree planning and development</p>
6. Monitoring and review processes are effective and inform enhancement activity	<p>Mechanisms to ensure on-going reflection and enhancement of quality management processes</p> <p>Mechanisms for annual review and reporting of the standards and quality of research degrees</p> <p>The use of quantitative and qualitative data to inform strategic planning, review and understanding of student outcomes including external examiner comments, student feedback, PRES outcomes, and data relating to the student journey</p> <p>The use of student feedback in the monitoring and review of research degrees</p> <p>Processes to assure continuing validity and currency of research degrees</p>
7. The management of collaborative provision is effective in ensuring that academic standards are maintained	<p>Processes for maintaining oversight of the quality of collaborative research degree provision</p> <p>The alignment of quality management processes for collaborative provision to University policy as set out in QH Section 10 and its supplements</p>
8. Public information	<p>The management of the postgraduate research environment statement to</p>

ensure it remains current and fit for purpose

The management and appropriateness of offer letters to ensure relevant information about responsibilities and entitlements is included

Information provided to students about the responsibilities of their supervisory team

Arrangements for the approval of public information related to collaborative provision

Aspect 2: The quality and enhancement of the student learning opportunities

Expectations	Factors
<p>1. Deliberate steps are taken to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities</p>	<p>The strategic planning of, and evidence base for, enhancement initiatives</p> <p>The use of quality assurance processes to identify opportunities for enhancement</p> <p>The efficacy of the approach to measuring the impact of enhancements</p> <p>The opportunities for the identification, support and dissemination of good practice</p>
<p>2. Professional standards for teaching, learning and research degree supervision are supported</p>	<p>The extent to which research, scholarship and/or professional practice informs teaching and supervision</p> <p>The provision and oversight of staff development opportunities for supervisors, and engagement with these opportunities</p> <p>The provision and oversight of timely induction and development for new supervisors</p> <p>How supervisors are provided with sufficient time to carry out their duties effectively</p> <p>The extent to which there is a shared understanding of supervisory responsibilities</p> <p>The extent to which curriculum design (for professional doctorates) and PhD projects are informed by recent pedagogic developments, research, external sources and University goals</p>
<p>3. The quality of learning resources is appropriate</p>	<p>The suitability of the research environment for ensuring appropriate learning</p>

	<p>opportunities</p> <p>The collective expertise of staff for effective delivery and support of research degrees and staff development opportunities thereto</p> <p>The facilitation of learning through the provision of appropriate resources, including academic support</p>
<p>4. Opportunities for developing research, professional and personal skills are in place for all research degree students, and are reviewed and monitored regularly</p>	<p>The provision of a researcher development programme</p> <p>The extent to which the research development programme is aligned to the Vitae Researcher Development Framework</p> <p>The extent to which individual student development needs are identified, jointly agreed and reviewed</p>
<p>5. Effective arrangements are in place to support students in their learning</p>	<p>Career education, information, advice and guidance</p> <p>Pastoral support for all students</p> <p>Student induction</p>

4. The review panel

The review panel ensures that externality, seniority, quality management expertise and specialist knowledge about research degrees informs the discussion and review outcomes.

Requirements

4.1 The review panel comprises seven members:

- a. Review Chair: The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic Development & Performance) or an academic Pro Vice-Chancellor of the University (excluding the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research & Enterprise);
- b. Review Manager: a Senior Standards and Quality Officer from CADQ;
- c. External Panel Member: a senior academic member of an institution external to the University with significant knowledge of research degrees, who has experience in HE quality management and who has had no connection with the University in the past three years;
- d. Three internal panel members; including two colleagues from the academic Schools with experience of research degrees provision;

- e. Student Panel Member: NTU Students' Union officer or their nominee, ideally with experience of research degrees.

Explanatory notes

- Each review panel member undertakes a specific role. Two members focus on Aspect 1, and two panel members focus specifically on Aspect 2. It is the role of the Chair and the Review Manager to maintain oversight of both aspects. The role of the Student Representative is to focus on the effectiveness of student engagement and the student voice across both aspects.
- The Doctoral School identifies a Periodic Research Degrees Review Lead, who takes prime responsibility for preparing for the PRDR.
- The detail of the responsibilities associated with different roles both within the panel and the Doctoral School are provided in QHS 7F.

5. Review outcomes

The review panel arrive at a judgement about each of the aspects that have been considered based on evidence from the documentation provided in advance and the discussions that take place during the review event itself.

Requirements

- 5.1 For each aspect, the following four judgements are possible.
 - a. Commended;
 - b. Meets NTU and UK expectations;
 - c. Requires improvement to meet NTU and UK expectations;
 - d. Does not meet NTU and UK expectations.
- 5.2 The panel use the framework provided at the end of this section in order to come to the review judgement for each of the two aspects under review.
- 5.3 The panel also agrees any recommendations, commendations and affirmations.
- 5.4 These judgements are fed back at the end of the review event.
- 5.5 The rationale and evidence base for these judgements, recommendations and commendations are articulated in the Periodic Research Degrees Review Report which is approved by ASQC on behalf of Academic Board.

- 5.6 A follow-up meeting between the review panel Chair, CADQ and appropriate representatives from the Doctoral School and academic Schools takes place after receipt of the report in order to agree any action plan related to the recommendations made by the panel. Following this meeting the action plan is received by ASQC and URC.
- 5.7 Progress on these actions is reported to ASQC. All actions should be reported as completed within a year after the Review event.

Explanatory notes

- The recommendations indicate the timeframe within which the review panel considers that the recommendations should be acted upon.
- Commendations describe the practice that the panel observes which is considered exemplary, innovative and/or transferable.
- Affirmations made by the panel acknowledge developments already in place, or planned, to address previously identified issues.

6. Appeal against review outcomes

- 6.1 In order to appeal the outcome of the Periodic Research Degrees Review, an appeal must be presented to ASQC within 14 days of the receipt of the confirmed report.
- 6.2 If a matter of dispute is not resolved by ASQC, the Head may make a direct submission to Academic Board.
- 6.3 Academic Board will consider the matter itself or by means of a working party. The appeal body, whether Academic Board itself or its working party, may exclude members involved in the earlier decision. It will receive the representation of both parties, together or separately, and may:
- a. confirm the decision of the Periodic Research Degrees Review;
 - b. refer the case back to the Periodic Research Degrees Review Panel with instructions to consider the proposal *de novo*;
 - c. rescind the decision and make recommendations for action toward further progress; or
 - d. make such other arrangements for the determination of the issue as it deems appropriate.
- 6.4 The decision of Academic Board will be final.

Framework for Periodic Research Degrees Review Judgements			
Commended	Meets NTU and UK expectations	Requires improvement to reach NTU and UK expectations	Does not meet NTU and UK expectations
The majority of expectations have been fully met. Any expectations that are not fully met are mostly met.	All, or nearly all, expectations have been fully or mostly met.	Most expectations have been at least partly met.	Several expectations have not been, or are partly met and/or there are serious gaps in one or more expectations.
There may be some minor omissions or oversights in some of the evidence provided to the panel, but these do not compromise the overall quality of the approach and provision.	Any expectations not met are not considered to present significant risk.	Those expectations that have not been met, may not present significant risk at present, but if unaddressed have the potential to compromise quality.	Those expectations that have not been met, or are not sufficiently met, do pose serious risks. There is concern about the control mechanisms in place to mitigate these risks.
<p>Likely to be characterised by at least some of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • compelling evidence of the commitment to achieving excellence in standards and quality management and in the quality and enhancement of student learning opportunities. • numerous and widespread examples of good practice. • a strategic approach for building on good practice. • where appropriate, examples of developments, planned or in train, which seek to address issues previously identified. 	<p>Likely to be characterised by at least some of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evidence that the Doctoral and Academic Schools are able to maintain and promote the quality and standards appropriate for research degrees provision. • several examples of good practice. • the need to give further thought to a particular factor(s) which contributes to an expectation not being fully met. • the need to address details in documentation which do not materially affect practice. • the need to update or amend minor omissions or oversights. • the need to further develop activity already planned, to more fully meet expectations. 	<p>Likely to be characterised by at least some of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • significant weakness(es) in some processes, or which have some shortcomings. • a lack of awareness about the potential problem(s) identified by the panel. • failure to take prompt and appropriate action to address a problem previously identified. 	<p>Likely to be characterised by at least some of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ineffective operation of quality management processes. • significant gaps in process, structures or procedures relating to quality management. • a lack of compliance with NTU quality assurance policy. • a lack of awareness about the problem(s) identified by the panel.

Policy owner
CADQ

Change history			
<i>Version:</i>	<i>Approval date:</i>	<i>Implementation date:</i>	<i>Nature of significant revisions:</i>
Sept 2017	01.09.17	01.09.17	New
Sept 2018	12.09.18	01.10.18	None
Sept 2019	11.09.19	01.10.19	Additional factor in Aspect 2 Expectation 1 regarding efficacy of approach to measuring the impact of enhancements
Sept 2020	16.09.20	01.10.20	None

Equality Analysis		
<i>Version:</i>	<i>EA date:</i>	<i>Completed by:</i>
Sept 2017	01.10.17	CADQ