CODE OF PRACTICE FOR POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH DEGREES

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SUMMARY

What is this document about?

This Code of Practice sets out the overall responsibilities and expectations of all those engaged in research degree programmes across all research subject disciplines at the University of Portsmouth. It provides guiding principles and standards of good practice which underpin the University's commitment to support and develop excellent researchers in the pursuit of high quality research. These areas include supervision, researcher development training and monitoring progress of research degree students. More detailed guidance is available within the Research Regulations, the Postgraduate Research Student Handbook and the Handbook for Postgraduate Research Supervisors.

The Code aims to ensure that:

- the highest standards of integrity and professionalism are observed in the conduct of research;
- appropriate standards and quality are consistently maintained for all research degree programme awards including Integrated and Professional Doctorates.

The Code is reviewed regularly and informed by Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) UK Quality Code, external research sector guidance, and University strategy, policy and regulatory sources.

Who is this for?

This document will be of most interest to individuals undertaking or supporting a research degree programme at the University of Portsmouth, including postgraduate research students (PGRSs), academic and support staff.

It will be of interest to prospective postgraduate research students and the UK QAA. It may also be of interest to the wider public.

How does the University check this is followed?

The University has various formal approaches to checking standards of good practice and implementation of this Code of Practice. This includes Academic Council, as the Academic Board of the University of Portsmouth and its sub-committees which oversee the review of policies, regulations and procedures for research degrees; feedback from External Examiners and postgraduate research students; and annual monitoring and periodic review through our Programme Monitoring and Review Policy.

Who can you contact if you have any queries about this document?

This Code has been developed by Academic Standards, Quality and Partnerships and the Chair of University Research Degrees Committee. See Annex A for related policies and other internal and external sources of information and guidance. If you have any questions about this Code of Practice please contact Academic Standards, Quality and Partnerships at asqp@port.ac.uk in the first instance.

This document is pending revision subject to the outcome of the University Academic Regulations review scheduled for 2021/22.

CODE OF PRACTICE FOR POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH DEGREES

Introduction

This Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Degrees has been developed to guide staff and students in the responsibilities and expectations they should have when undertaking or supervising research degrees within the University of Portsmouth.

The Code of Practice provides a framework to support the management of research degrees across all subject disciplines at the University of Portsmouth, providing guiding principles which support the University's commitment to develop excellent researchers. It also aims to ensure that appropriate quality and standards are maintained for research programmes which include MPhil, PhD, MD, Integrated Doctorates and Professional Doctorate awards in line with internal documents and policies.

The Code of Practice recognises that there will be some variation in practice across the institution since there are differences between disciplines, and in particular it acknowledges that there is a more substantial proportion of teaching combined with the research in the Integrated Doctorate and Professional Doctorate programmes than is found in the traditional PhD research programmes.

This Code of Practice has been informed by internal and external sources of guidance listed in Annex A.

1. Institutional principles for research degrees

1.1. The University recognises its responsibility to researchers and the wider community to ensure the highest standards of integrity and professionalism are observed in the conduct of research. In order to fulfil these responsibilities, it is expected that all those engaged in research should adhere to the following principles:

- to support and enhance excellent research;
- to maintain a professional, collegiate and supportive approach to all involved in the research degree process;
- to apply honesty in the research design, including aims and objectives, the research method(s) and process for data collection, reporting results, data analysis, interpretation and conclusions;
- to produce high quality ethical work for dissemination, declaring any conflicts of interest where appropriate;
- to identify skills and resources required, completing any appropriate training and development to carry out the research;
- to keep up-to-date with current regulatory, professional body codes of practice and legal requirements along with relevant University policies and procedures;

- to comply with legal, ethical and regulatory requirements in the UK and in countries where the research is conducted or participants are from, relevant to the field of study and any collaborative partner organisations;

- to comply with health and safety legislation ensuring that prior to research being undertaken adequate insurance and indemnity is in place;

- to conduct risk assessment to identify any concerns regarding the safety and welfare of all those involved in the research considering dignity and rights so that unnecessary risk or harm to research participants, researchers, patients, animals or others is avoided;

- to sustain research integrity by avoiding research misconduct which includes plagiarism, making up results, changing data or misuse of personal data, lack of informed consent, breach of confidentiality, misrepresentation of involvement or failing to disclose or address any misconduct.

1.2. Ethical review

The University has in place an **Ethics Policy** which provides a framework for professional practice and decision making on ethical issues. The University Ethics Committee which reports to Academic Council ensures that appropriate consideration is given to ethical issues and reviews and approves the principles and procedures used by Faculty Ethics Committees.

No data collection or recruitment of participants can commence until ethical review has been undertaken.

Ethical review is undertaken externally where policy or law dictate this (i.e. by NHS Research Ethics Committee) and details of the process for ethical approval of proposed research to be undertaken by a PGRS are included in the Research Regulations, Postgraduate Research Student Handbook and the Handbook for Postgraduate Research Supervisors.

2. Academic standards and quality assurance processes for research degrees

2.1. Academic committees

The following structure is in place to assure the academic standards and quality of provision of research degrees. The structure allows for information flow both vertically and horizontally to ensure that issues are considered in the most appropriate forum and for outcomes to be fed back effectively.

University level

Academic Council is the Academic Board of the University of Portsmouth and is constituted in accordance with the Articles of Government. Academic Council has responsibility for general issues relating to research, scholarship, teaching and courses and for the definition and approval of the University's awards. It is ultimately responsible for the maintenance of academic standards and the approval of Academic Regulations. It also has ultimate responsibility for the quality assurance processes.

The subcommittees of Academic Council in respect of academic standards and quality assurance are Quality Assurance Committee (QAC), Academic Policy Committee (APC) and, for postgraduate research degree programmes, University Research Degrees Committee (URDC).

Academic Policy Committee (APC) has delegated authority from Academic Council, as necessary, for debating and approving the policies and regulations that support the establishment of standards and the assessment of student performance, for example, Academic Regulations.

Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) has delegated authority from Academic Council, as necessary, for the detailed management of academic standards and quality assurance.

The **University Research Degrees Committee** (URDC) has a wide ranging terms of reference covering all aspects of policy and strategy related to research degree provision. **The Graduate School Management Board** (GSMB), as an operational group, assists the URDC to fulfil its terms of reference. There is faculty level input into the work of the URDC through the representative from the Faculty Research Degrees Committees (FRDC).

In addition to URDC reporting to Academic Council, there is input into the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) and its work through the annual and periodic programme monitoring processes. On an annual basis, the Annual Standards and Quality Evaluative Reports (ASQERs) from each FRDC are reviewed by the URDC and inform the Director of the Graduate School's paper to Academic Policy and Quality Group. ASQER reports inform the Chair of QAC's annual report to Academic Council on academic standards and quality. Periodic Review of postgraduate research degree programmes is operated at institutional level which includes external assessors.

Faculty level

Each faculty has a **Faculty Research Degree Committee** (FRDC). URDC delegates the responsibility for the approval of supervision and examination arrangements of individual candidates to the FRDC.

Student Voice

PGRS are represented on academic and faculty committees, are panel members on Periodic Review and can provide feedback both internally and externally (see section 9 below).

2.2. Key areas which will be monitored through the academic standards and quality assurance structure outlined above are:

- The provision of appropriate research environments.
- The selection, admission and induction of students.
- The supervision arrangements.
- The monitoring and review of student progress.
- The development of students' research and other skills.
- The assessment procedures.

- The reviewing and monitoring of the quality of provision using internal and external feedback including student representation and feedback.

- The processes for dealing equitably and efficiently with problems, allegations of research misconduct, complaints, appeals, and reviews.

Further details on these are provided in the following sections.

3. Research environment

3.1. The University of Portsmouth's vision for research is set out in the **Research and Innovation Strategy 2015–2020** .

3.2. The University of Portsmouth is committed to maintaining a high quality research environment that will support researchers at all levels, and encourages research and knowledge transfer activity.

3.3. Research degree opportunities are offered only where appropriate facilities and support are available. This takes into account staff experience of supervising postgraduate research students, research and/or knowledge transfer activity, expertise and achievement. Other essential factors are appropriate infrastructure, availability of necessary instrumentation, and sufficient funding to support such facilities to enable a student to complete an agreed programme of work successfully.

3.4. All PGRS are linked to one or more research areas in which excellent quality research occurs. This research may be recognised through the area's research achievements, number of research active staff, and/or the knowledge and impact of the research occurring there.

3.5. The University has developed a number of minimum resource expectations for research degree students, published each year in the Postgraduate Research Student Handbook and which covers such areas as access to: office space, desks and computers; to telephones, IT and library; and to funding for conferences. In addition to this minimum, many departments offer further resources to reflect the specialist needs of the cognate disciplines grouped within them, as outlined in departmental research environment statements.

4. Selection, admission, and induction

4.1. Selection and admission procedures are transparent and equitable, and comply fully with the University's Admissions Policy and Equality and Diversity Policy. These processes ensure that the applicant is suitably qualified, experienced, and prepared to enable him/her to succeed and that the University can provide the necessary resources to enable a research student to complete the programme successfully. Information on programmes and admissions procedures is made available to applicants through the postgraduate prospectus, departmental literature, and on the University's website. Guidance on selection and admission is provided to staff in Part 2 of the Handbook for Postgraduate Research Supervisors. All admissions or interview panels must involve individuals who have been formally trained in the selection and admission of research students.

4.2. The requirements for acceptance are clearly stated in the research regulations and on the Graduate School website along with details of the application process. At least two academic members of staff including the potential First Supervisor (or Course Leader for Professional Doctorate programmes) will be involved in evaluating the application form and supporting documentation prior to inviting acceptable applicants for an interview. A final decision to admit an applicant is approved by the Head of Department and ratified by the appropriate Chair FRDC following consideration of the suitability, capacity and competence of the supervisory team, and the availability of resources and funding.

4.3. The PGRS induction process comprises of the University-wide Graduate School induction complemented by induction at faculty and department/school level. This process is customised to meet the varying requirements of the different disciplines and different locations within the institution and includes generic information on the PGRS's legal and ethical responsibilities, and on the resources and facilities available (including computing and library resources, general and specialised software, sources of information) . PGRS will be expected to meet with the full supervision team during induction to outline roles, expectations and responsibilities and to agree priorities.

4.4. PGRS will be provided with information on where to access this Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Degrees, the Research Regulations and the Postgraduate Research Student Handbook. The PGRS Handbook provide details of a student's entitlements and responsibilities, information on health and safety procedures, representation and feedback and the availability of welfare and advisory services. Induction is supplemented over the programme of research by further researcher development training provided mainly through the Graduate School and students are encouraged to use the PRaXiS formal structured personal development profiling programme.

5. Supervision

Supervision is a partnership between supervisor and PGRS with both having rights and responsibilities that are clearly defined in the Postgraduate Research Student Handbook, and the Handbook for Postgraduate Research Supervisors.

5.1. A supervisory team is proposed as part of the application process, the Chair FRDC, Departmental Research Degree Coordinator and Head of Department/School sign the Research Student Registration (RSR) form to approve the appointment of the supervisory team on behalf of the FRD Committee. All PGRS will have one main or First Supervisor and the criteria for the appointment of the supervisory team are included in the Research Regulations with guidance in the Handbook for Postgraduate Research Supervisors.

5.2. Members of the supervisory team will be engaged in research and have experience of supervising PGRS to successful completion and will have knowledge of the student's research area and/or the theoretical background to the area. The approval of the supervisory team will take account of individuals' workload (teaching, administration, and external commitments) and existing supervisory activity. This should not normally exceed six full-time equivalent or ten individual PGRS at any one time for each member of the supervisory team. This is to ensure that the supervisory team are not responsible for more PGRS than can be adequately and equitably supervised. In general, the Chair FRDC monitors the capacity of individual supervisors within their faculty on behalf of Faculty Research Degree Committee.

5.3. It is essential that PGRS have appropriate contact with the supervisory team, and the minimum amount of contact will be formally agreed at the beginning of the research programme in the first meeting with the supervisory team. The minimum expectation is that full-time PGRS will meet with their First Supervisor (or appropriate member of the supervisory team) at least fortnightly during the first three months of the research programme with meetings at least once every six weeks thereafter.

Students in some disciplines will meet much more regularly than this. Meetings may be held face-to-face or by phone, video conference or similar. The majority of meetings are with the First Supervisor; however, meetings with the entire supervisory team should take place at least once a term. Part-time PGRS will normally meet with their First Supervisor (or appropriate member of the supervisory team) at least monthly during the first three months and at least two-monthly thereafter with a minimum of one meeting per year with the full supervisory team. This expectation of agreed contact is included within the Postgraduate Research Student Handbook and the Handbook for Postgraduate Research Supervisors. It is the joint responsibility of all members of the supervisory team and the PGRS to ensure that an appropriate number of meetings occur. The Departmental Research Degrees Coordinator/PG tutor can advise if this is unclear.

5.4. The Graduate School provides a number of Research Supervision events each year. All academic staff new to the role of supervisor must attend the introductory workshop for research supervisors at the earliest available opportunity. Supervisors resuming the role after a gap of five or more years must attend the introductory workshop. Experienced supervisors are encouraged to update their knowledge of new developments and an update for experienced supervisors is also provided by the Graduate School which may be attended periodically by all existing supervisors. It is expected that supervisors will attend at least one research supervisor event every five years.

5.5. Experienced members of the supervisory team will act as mentors for less experienced colleagues. The Head of Department will ensure that appropriate supervision is maintained. Where a First Supervisor is absent from the institution for extended periods of time, or leaves the institution, support will normally be provided by other members of the supervisory team until the Head of Department can propose a replacement First Supervisor. Where a PGRS is unhappy with any aspect of the supervision, then in the first instance this should be dealt with by the departmental representative on FRDC, or the Head of Department. If problems cannot be resolved at this level, then they should be passed to the Chair FRDC.

6. Progress and review arrangements

6.1. Progress is reviewed through a number of mechanisms such as: informal contacts between PGRS and the supervisory team, departmental/faculty-wide research presentations by PGRS, formal recorded meetings with the First Supervisor, an Annual Review of progress, and a Major Review. The purposes and frequency of meetings and reviewing progress will be discussed by the supervisory team and PGRS at the start of the programme. A record of meetings with the supervisory team must be kept and required documents for monitoring progress completed. The Skills Forge software, available to all PGRS and supervisors and may be used to record both notes from formal meetings and any development opportunities undertaken.

6.2. PGRS will complete an Annual Review of progress that involves individuals independent of the supervisory team and PGRS.

The purpose and procedures of this regulatory requirement are explained in both the Postgraduate Research Student Handbook and the Handbook for Postgraduate Research Supervisors. The Annual Review will:

- provide overall support for the PGRS;
- confirm adequate progress with the approved programme of research to maximise the likelihood of successful completion within an appropriate timescale;
- identify training needs;
- review progress over the period preceding the Annual Review;
- agree a programme of work and timetable for the coming year;
- provide an opportunity to discuss any issues;
- report the outcomes to FRDC.

There is an opportunity for a PGRS to submit a confidential, independent report if they are not satisfied with the formal Annual Review report, or if they consider that there are problems that have not been satisfactorily resolved. A PGRS will not be allowed to progress if the Annual Review documents are not submitted to the Academic Registry.

6.3. A Major Review of progress will be made for all PGRS registered for a PhD or MD. This will be after 12 months for full time and after 24 months for PGRS on Integrated Doctorates, and for part-time students. PGRS registered and submitting for the award of MPhil are exempt from this process, but those wishing to change their registration to PhD can use this mechanism. The purpose and procedures for the Major Review are clearly explained in both the Postgraduate Research Student Handbook and the Handbook for Postgraduate Research Supervisors. The Major Review provides an opportunity to:

- examine progress in the research and whether the project can be completed within the time available;
- examine progress in the programme of training and development;
- provide supplementary advice and guidance to that provided by the supervisory team;
- produce a report of the outcomes of the Major Review to FRDC.

Professional Doctorate students do not have a Major Review but do have an Annual Review at yearly periods after their Research and Professional Development Project Proposal has been fully approved and the Board of Examiners has confirmed they can progress to the research phase.

6.4. At any stage of registration when a PGRS is having difficulty in making satisfactory progress or in reaching the necessary standard, the supervisory team can request an Interim Examination by an independent formal panel to allow the student to demonstrate that the standard of work, and the commitment to the work is sufficient to continue the registration.

7. Development of research and other skills

7.1. The University is committed to provision of training, development, education and support for all its PGRS to ensure that they develop the intellectual, research and transferable skills they need to enhance their employability and underpin their career development. The principles on which the programme has been devised are informed by the European University Association (EUA) Salzburg II Recommendations (2010); the RCUK Researcher Development Framework (RDF) (September 2010) and the QAA UK Quality Code Chapter B11.

7.2. The Graduate School Development Programme has been designed to enable PGRS to achieve the skills and abilities needed to be an effective researcher. The University will provide a tailored programme of Personal Development Planning (PDP/PRaXiS), informed by the Research Development Framework, with learning needs analysis in order to enable students to plan, monitor, and record their achievements. PRaXiS will be embedded in existing supervisory arrangements, and progress will be monitored at formal meetings with the First Supervisor, in the Annual Review and in the Major Review.

7.3. Professional Doctorate students develop these skills during Stage 2, Part 1 of their programme of study and may attend Graduate School Development Programmes sessions should they wish. All research training provision is subject to the same quality assurance procedures as apply to all other taught courses within the University, and units are evaluated annually.

Applications for accreditation of prior experiential and/or certificated learning in relation to taught aspects of the research degrees programmes are considered under the University's guidelines.

7.4. After attending the orientation for the mandatory Graduate Students Professional Development Programme (GPROF) teacher training course, PGRS may be offered opportunities to undertake assistant teaching and/or demonstrating duties up to a maximum of six hours per week. It is expected that GPROF training is completed within six months.

7.5. All students have access to professional employability advice and guidance, at any stage in their programme of study, to help them make informed decisions relating to career direction.

8. Assessment

8.1. The criteria for the award of postgraduate research degrees are described in the Awards of the University of Portsmouth document that is approved by Academic Council. Procedures for preparation and submission of theses, and examination procedures are clearly described in the Postgraduate Research Student Handbook and the Handbook for Postgraduate Research Supervisors, and are specified in the Academic Regulations.

8.2. PGRS are given support and training in preparing for a viva voce examination.For each candidate the University appoints a minimum of two examiners, which must include at least one External Examiner, in accordance with the Research Regulations.Approval of the examination arrangements including the examination team is the responsibility of the Chair of FRDC, on behalf of and reviewed by FRDC.

8.3. Circumstances when an Independent Chair may be appointed for the viva voce examination are included with the Research Regulations and include that the appointment of an Independent Chair may be requested by the PGRS.

8.4. Each of the examiners submits an independent report on the thesis before an oral examination.First Supervisors may attend the viva voce examination if the student requests their presence; however they may not take part in the examination.After the oral examination the examiners complete a joint report form and the result of the examination is officially communicated to the student by the Research Section in Academic Registry.Examiners' reports are monitored by the Chair of FRDC so that generic feedback can be included anonymously into the quality assurance reporting system.

9. Student representation and feedback mechanisms

The University is committed to working in partnership with its students.For PGRS this takes a number of forms including student representation on committees, panel membership for Periodic Review, and mechanisms for providing written feedback:

9.1. Students, research administrators and researchers are represented on University, departmental and faculty research degrees committees where satisfaction with the provision, or enhancements, can be expressed, for example, there is student representation on FRDC and URDC.

9.2. Students participate in Periodic Review where there is also panel membership.

9.3. In addition to these routes, Integrated Doctorate and Professional Doctorate PGRS are represented through 'taught' mechanisms including Student Staff Consultative Committees (SSCC) and Boards of Studies.

9.4. The University collects anonymous feedback on a biennial basis through the University of Portsmouth Research Student Experience Survey (UPRSES).

9.5. PGRS also submit feedback through nationally organised schemes.This provides information not only on local satisfaction with a wide range of aspects of the provision, but also national benchmarking information.The Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) is a biennial sector-wide survey provided by the Higher Education Academy and is designed to inform enhancements to the student learning experience.This survey is completed in alternate years to the UPRSES.

9.6. The feedback obtained from either UPRSES or PRES is reviewed in the Annual Quality Review cycle both at faculty and institutional levels and discussed at the Graduate School Management Board and URDC.

9.7. Feedback is also sought from External Examiners through Examiners Report Forms, a copy of the examination pack which includes all the examiners reports (internal and external) is sent to the Chair, FRD for consideration and discussion as appropriate at FRDC and in the ASQER report.

10. Complaints and appeals

The University is committed to treating complaints seriously and in confidence.Informal discussion of the concerns with the First Supervisor is advised at an early stage to resolve any area of dissatisfaction.

10.1. PGRS should attempt to discuss any dissatisfaction with the quality of their supervision with a member of the supervisory team, or if this is not feasible they should raise the matter informally and confidentially with the academic representative on the Faculty Research Degree Committee or Head of Department/School.

10.2. The PGRS can also request for an issue to be considered by Chair FRDC through the PGRS representation on the committee.The formal stages of complaints and appeals are those used for all students in the University, and clear guidance on these is provided for PGRS and for departments.Independent assistance is available for any student wishing to lodge a formal appeal or complaint.

11. Collaborative research degree partnerships

The University has in place procedures for approval of research degree partnerships that may be tailored to individual arrangements, providing flexibility within a quality assurance framework proportionate to any risks involved as part of the proposed collaboration.

A collaborative research degree arrangement is considered when the University of Portsmouth research award is dependent on another delivery or support organisation.Further guidance regarding collaborative research arrangements is available in the **Collaborative Provision Policy** .

ANNEX A

Sources of information and guidance

Sector-wide sources of information and guidance

- UK Quality Code for Higher Education – Chapter B11 Research Degrees
- UK Quality Code for Higher Education – Chapter B10 Managing Higher Education Provision with Others
- Research Council UK Policy and Guidelines on Governance of Good Research Practice – February 2013
- Universities UK Research
- Vitae Researcher Development Framework
- Postgraduate Research Experience Survey

University sources of information and guidance

- University Strategy 2015–2020
- Research and Innovation Strategy 2015–2020
- Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Degrees
- Programme Monitoring and Review Policy
- Collaborative Provision Policy
- Code of Practice for Work-based and Placement Learning
- Ethics Policy
- Intellectual Property (IP) Policy
- Awards of the University of Portsmouth

University Regulations

- Regulations for the Award of Higher Degrees by Research
- Regulations for Professional Doctorate – Stage 2 Part 2
- Regulations for Integrated Doctorates
- Regulations for the Award of Doctor of Philosophy by Publication

Guidance

- Postgraduate Research Student Handbook
- Handbook for Postgraduate Research Supervisors

Other documentation

- Code of Student Behaviour
- Main University of Portsmouth Student Handbook