

UK QUALITY CODE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Advice and Guidance

Research Degrees

Expectations and Practices

The advice underneath the Expectations and Practices is not mandatory for providers but illustrative of a range of possible approaches.

Expectations for Standards

1. The academic standards of courses meet the requirements of the relevant national qualifications framework.

This Expectation ensures that research degree-awarding bodies align their postgraduate awards with the relevant qualification framework.

2. The value of qualifications awarded to students at the point of qualification and over time is in line with sector-recognised standards.

This Expectation ensures that research degrees awarded by providers continue to reflect sector-recognised standards such as the QAA Doctoral Degrees Characteristic Statement.

Core practice

The provider ensures that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers.

In practice, this means that the provision of a research environment conducive to learning and developing research combined with the provision of encouraging and supportive supervision, would improve opportunities for research students to achieve beyond the threshold level.

Common practice

The provider reviews its core practices for standards regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.

In practice, this means that research degrees form a distinct area of provision and therefore review and enhancement activity should be viewed across both in the context of provider practices, across all provision in order to consider any implications for research degrees and provider practices that only relate to research degrees.

Expectations for quality

1. Courses are well-designed, provide a high-quality academic experience for all students and enable a student's achievement to be reliably assessed.

This Expectation relates to the provision of research supervision, environment, progression and examination of research degrees. Higher education providers have in place mechanisms for the monitoring and enhancement of the quality of their provision of research degrees that is both inclusive and supportive of students.

2. From admission through to completion, all students are provided with the support that they need to succeed in and benefit from higher education.

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This Expectation encompasses the breadth of subject and supervisory expertise available to research students and the research environment, which will enable students to develop and generate new knowledge through exploration and learning of research.

Core Practices

- The provider designs and/or delivers high-quality courses.
In practice, this means that supervision of research students equates to the delivery of a course (albeit a programme of individual research) to ensure that the progress stages and support provided effectively contribute to the delivery and outcomes for research students.
- Where the provider offers research degrees, it delivers these in appropriate and supportive research environments.
In practice, this means that supportive research environments and infrastructure serve to enable positive research outcomes through contextualising research, exposing research students to research culture skills, responding to research students' changing needs, and encouraging creativity, critical independent thought and originality of research outcomes.
- The provider supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes.
In practice, this identifies the need to enable successful outcomes through the support infrastructure and contributing factors including regulatory frameworks, research environment, supervisory processes, research skills support, progress and review arrangements, and clarity of responsibilities.

Guiding principles

The guiding principles given here are not mandatory for any provider. They are a concise expression of the fundamental practices of the higher education sector, based on the experience of a wide range of providers. They are intended as a framework for providers to consider when establishing new or looking at existing higher education provision. They are not exhaustive and there will be other ways for providers to meet their requirements.

1. Provision of information is clear and accessible to research students and staff.
Providers that have research degree awarding powers have specific regulations and codes of practice for research degrees that are clear, regularly reviewed and accessible to research students and staff, including examiners. Responsibilities of research students and staff supervising, assessing and supporting research students are clearly communicated.
2. The research environment is supportive and inclusive for all research students.
Providers accept research students into a sustainable, inclusive and supportive research environment for undertaking and learning about research throughout the programme of study. The environment should support/facilitate research achievement, taking account of the diverse needs of research students.
3. Supervisors are appropriately skilled and supported.

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Providers ensure that each student has an appropriately skilled and knowledgeable supervisory team, which includes a main supervisor as the key contact. Supervisors should be provided with sufficient time, support and opportunities to develop and maintain their supervisory practice.

4. Research students are afforded opportunities for professional development.
Providers ensure that research students are provided with appropriate opportunities to regularly reflect on and develop their personal, professional and research skills in consultation with their supervisory team.
5. Progression monitoring is clearly defined and operated.
Providers put in place clearly defined mechanisms for monitoring and supporting research student progress and outcomes from admission to successful completion, including formal and explicit reviews of progress at different stages.
6. Higher education providers offer clear guidance and processes on assessment for research degrees.
Providers, recognising the underpinning principles applicable to all assessment (see also Assessment Theme), operate robust and clear procedures for assessing research degrees, taking into account the UK qualification descriptors and characteristic statements.