**GUIDANCE AND PROCEDURES FOR THE PREPARATION, SUBMISSION AND CONSIDERATION OF RESEARCH PROPOSALS USING FORMS R1:**

***APPLICATION TO REGISTER FOR A RESEARCH DEGREE***

***Encompassing:***

* ***Master of Philosophy (MPhil)***
* ***Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)***
* ***Research stage of the Professional Doctorate award***

**2017**

Based on the edition approved by the Board of Studies for Research Degrees on 17 October 2012.

**Preface**

1. This guidanceapplies to all applicants seeking to register for one of the research degrees of MPhil, PhD via MPhil, or PhD direct (including the PhD by Published Work and PhD by Practice) and for the research stage of a Professional Doctorate award.

ii. The *Postgraduate* *Research Degree Regulations* (Section 3) require research proposals to be submitted in support of applications to register for a research degree and for those applications to be approved by the Board of Studies for Research Degrees. The research proposal is intended to provide evidence of the suitability of: the applicant; the supervisory arrangements; the feasibility and appropriateness of the proposal for the intended award; the available facilities; and the programme of related studies.

iii. This guidance is intended to help applicants and supervisors to understand the process of completing and submitting an application to register for a masters- or doctoral-level research degree and to explain the procedures for the consideration of applications. The guidance should be read in conjunction with the more specific requirements noted on Form R1 (use Form R1 (PW) to apply to register for a PhD by Published Work, Form R1 (Prac) to apply to register for a PhD by Practice, and Form R1 (PD) for Professional Doctorate students)[[1]](#footnote-1). The most recent version of the relevant Form R1 must be used, accessed from the R&GS web pages.

iv. When completing Form R1, applicants and supervisors should also have to hand the most recent version of the *Postgraduate* *Research Degree Regulations* |. These should be accessed from the relevant R&GS web pages. Specific references in all Forms R1 are to the *Postgraduate* *Research Degree Regulations*. The whole of the research proposal is to be contained within Form R1, although any supplementary information may be appended.

v. Before completing their application, applicants should attend the Postgraduate Research Student Skills Development Programme session on ‘Preparing Your Research Proposal’ and/or access the associated on-line materials. They should also secure, via their supervisors or peers, one or two examples of successful postgraduate research proposals within their general subject area.

vi. For research involving human participants, data or material, Form R1 must be accompanied by Form RE1 to demonstrate that any ethical issues raised by the research have been or are being addressed according to the University’s Research Ethics Review and Approval Procedures. (For the degree of PhD by Published Work or Practice by Route A – Retrospective, Form RE1 is not required because the relevant Form R1 (PW) or Form R1 (Prac) includes an alternative declaration).

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1. **COMPLETING FORM R1**

**1.1 General points**

1. Every section of Form R1 must be completed whilst conforming to (and supplying as requested) the word counts specified for particular sections. The form MUST be word-processed to a high standard using Arial 12 font.

ii. Applicants and supervisors should note that a form which is filled in incorrectly will be returned for the corrections to be made before it is submitted for approval.It is important to be aware of the proper requirements for completing the form so that a decision on the application can be made as quickly as possible and successful applications can be registered.

**1.2 Preamble**

1. Note from the *Postgraduate Research Degree Regulations* (Sections 1.3-1.4) the definition of what constitutes an MPhil and a PhD and, if appropriate to the chosen route, indicate clearly on Form R1 whether the application is for Master of Philosophy, Doctor of Philosophy via Master of Philosophy, or Doctor of Philosophy (see Regulation 2.3), and whether by full-time or part-time study (see Regulation 2.4), by deleting any options which are not appropriate.

ii. Insert the date the applicant initially enrolled in the University as a postgraduate student by research. Note that the starting date for registration purposes can be up to 4 months earlier than the date when the application is submitted (in the case of full-time students and part-time students of the PhD by Published Work or Practice) and 6 months earlier (in the case of all other part-time students), since the researcher is invariably already enrolled as a postgraduate student by research while the application is being prepared. Great importance is attached to the submission of applications within 4 or 6 months of initial enrolment and, if the start-date is to be back-dated more than 4 or 6 months, a separate covering letter will be needed explaining why (see *Postgraduate Research Degree Regulation* 4.5).

iii. Against the label ‘Subject Department’, insert the name of one of more of the host Faculty, Institute, School, Centre, Subject Department, Group, Field, Area or Division.

**1.3 Section 1: The Applicant**

*Name/Present post and place of work/Funding sources/Qualifications***[[3]](#footnote-3)**

Ensure all subsections here are fully completed. Poor quality and quantity of information will only result in delays in considering the application.

*Training and Experience*

An application is strengthened if it can refer to relevant material such as work experience, publications, or the title of an undergraduate or postgraduate dissertation or project. The title of the applicant’s master's thesis must be given if the application is for PhD direct (see Regulation 2.3). If there is nothing to add here insert "N/A".

**1.4 Section 2: Programme of Research**

*Title*

Give the title of the proposed investigation or the proposed title of the thesis which clearly and succinctly indicates the topic of the research. This will form the *approved* title for the research once the Board of Studies for Research Degrees has approved the R1. As such it is this title which will appear on the final certificate. Any change to the title subsequently must be made using the form R9. (Applicants to register for PhD by Published Work or PhD by Practice are then required to list any work already published or completed and work whose publication is planned which is to be submitted for the award. Forms R1 (PW) and R1 (Prac) contain further guidance to be followed when providing this information).

*Aim(s) and objectives of the investigation/Overall aim(s) of the research*

1. State the overall aim(s) of the research clearly and precisely. The intended outcome(s) of the research should be reflected in the aim(s) and the latter will guide the programme of research. The aim(s) should be sufficiently specific that achievement is discernible, but sufficiently general to provide a valuable overall summary of the intended outcome(s) of the research. Where applicable, the aim(s) should be numbered so as to be easily distinguishable in later sections and during consideration of the application.
2. Objectives are more detailed than aims and imply more specific, measurable and time-targeted goals. They deconstruct the aim(s) into a number of more concrete goals reflecting tasks which need to be completed in a particular way and by a particular time in order that the aim(s) can be achieved. Objectives usually form the basis of a Gantt chart or similar tool used to set out the timing of and relationships between the objectives of the research (see later in this document).

*Proposed plan of work/Development of the research – including its relationship to previous work – 1000 to 1500 words*

1. Read Sections 1.3-1.4, 3, and Annex 2 of the *Postgraduate* *Research Degree Regulations* and carefully follow the detailed guidance contained on the relevant Form R1. This is the core of the application, and often poses the greatest difficulty. One problem is that it may in some relevant cases be difficult to describe what is to be done beforehand, since the later stages of the research can often be determined by early stages. Nevertheless, it is necessary for the applicant to describe what it is planned to do or what has already been achieved in sufficient detail for a reader to decide whether the proposal is feasible and appropriate for the award to which it will lead. This section must:

a. demonstrate that the applicant is familiar with the existing literature on the chosen topic and that it is from this literature that the chosen research problem has emerged;

b. describe the research which it is intended to undertake or give an account of the development of the research and its intended outcomes;

c. justify the MPhil or PhD level of the research (see Regulations 1.3-1.4).

In the case of an application for PhD via MPhil it should also:

d. indicate where the MPhil component ends and the PhD component begins;

e. explain how the PhD component is a "significant contribution to knowledge".

ii. In order to demonstrate the applicant's familiarity with the topic which it is proposed to investigate, this section requires a BRIEF critical evaluation of the relevant literature (see the relevant R1 Form for further guidance). This is not by any means intended to form the first chapter of the thesis, but it should indicate that the applicant is aware of relevant historical and contemporary work in the area of the topic. A description of how research in the area of the topic has developed and its current position are required. All sources should be cited using a recognised academic style, with full bibliographical details provided either in the References or as a separate Bibliography.

iii. This section also contains the description of what the researcher is intending to do or has already achieved, depending on the chosen route (see the relevant Form R1 for further guidance). It will address such issues as: how does the work relate to previous work, what theoretical developments are claimed, what research methods and research methodologies employed, what data obtained, what thesis or argument proposed and/or tested. This section is the key element of the application and it is important that it is rational, clearly presented and sets the proposed research in its appropriate theoretical and methodological context. In the case of PhD applications it is important to stress the 'original contribution to knowledge' which the work will make. The 'originality' of a research topic may take various forms, for example:

a. the application of a theory or model in a new context;

b. the identification of new subject matter or new interpretations of existing subject matter;

 c. the development of new theory or significant refinement to existing theory;

 d. the development of new methodological approaches or the application of existing approaches in novel ways;

 e. empirical investigations leading to the discovery of new insights within a defined field.

What is important is that the proposal makes clear and justifies the precise nature of the originality of the intended research.

iv. Many standard proposals involve some form of data collection and analysis. It is essential that the applicant indicates what form the data will take and how it will be analysed. Statements such as "A questionnaire will be distributed and the responses analysed using the computer" are not adequate, and raise the suspicion that the applicant has not foreseen what the data will be like or precisely how it will be analysed. The applicant must be able to demonstrate a reasonable understanding of these matters in the application itself. Remember that the definitions of MPhil and PhD specify require holders of these degrees to possess an understanding of research methods appropriate to the chosen field.

v. It is important in the explanation of the research to define and justify the research methodology used and to explain why this particular methodology is chosen in preference to other methodologies. This is particularly important in those submissions which seek to argue that part of the originality of the research is contained within the application of a specific methodology to an existing problem. Remember that members of the local Standing Panel and of the Board of Studies for Research Degrees represent a variety of disciplines. They will not necessarily be familiar with the specific methodology chosen but they will expect to be able to understand from the proposal document, how the student has chosen their particular methodological approach in preference to others and how it will help to define the research problem.

vi. It is often useful to incorporate in this section a list of the stages through which the research is expected to pass from the date of enrolment as a postgraduate student by research and the approximate planned duration of each stage (in weeks or months). A Gantt chart or similar diagrammatic representation should be used to do this.

vii. In writing this section, keep the stated aim(s) in mind. It is helpful if the description or objectives of the research state explicitly how they relate to the aim(s) (for example, "This will fulfil aim 3"). It is also important to keep to the word limits specified in the relevant Form R1 and to include the word count. An application in which the limits are exceeded is likely to be returned with a request that it should be edited.

*Resources*

This should declare how the applicant will have access to necessary ‘hardware, software, methods and tools’, including library, laboratory and computing facilities, and where these are located. If there is a collaborating establishment, any facilities of theirs which will be used should be stated here.

*Collaborating Establishment*

i. Read *Postgraduate* *Research Degree Regulation* 1.5 and note the importance placed upon the existence of a collaborating establishment for certain types of research. A collaborating establishment is an entity which is actively involved in and/or providing support for the research by offering facilities such as laboratories, equipment, materials, or a substantial amount of expert advice on some aspect of the project.

ii. The definition of collaboration includes instances where at least one of the applicant’s proposed supervisors or advisors is employed by the external entity and where they will be supervising or advising with the knowledge and support of their employer[[4]](#footnote-4). It encompasses collaborative funding schemes such as Knowledge Transfer Partnerships and CASE awards but excludes applicants admitted under pre-existing written agreements between the University and another entity governing their joint management of research degree programmes.

iii. If there is a collaborating establishment, fill this section in. If there is no collaborating establishment, insert "N/A". If there is a collaborating establishment, a letter (or equivalent evidence) from them to indicate their awareness of and support for the research must be appended to Form R1. (This requirement does not however apply where collaboration is an integral part of the project and funding, e.g. Knowledge Transfer Partnerships or CASE awards).

**1.5 Section 3: Related Studies**

i. Note that either 3.1 or 3.2 should be completed.

ii. The *Postgraduate Research Degree Regulations* (Section 3.1(ii) and Annex 2, paragraph 1) emphasise the requirement that all students must follow a programme of related studies and acquire competence in relevant research methods. In addition, holders of a PhD from a UK University are nowadays expected to have developed a wide range of employment-related skills and attributes, beyond those associated solely with conducting research. In some cases, there may be a requirement to undertake a designated period of work placement/practicum during the studies and this must be made clear in this section of the form so that it forms part of the approval from the Board of Studies for Research Degrees. The completion of this work placement/practicum will then be entered on the R5 with supporting evidence so that it can be entered on the final transcript.

iii. For most applications, section 3.1 is the relevant one. At the time of the oral examination, candidates will be required to certify that these studies have been completed. In addition to applicants’ required engagement with the University’s Postgraduate Research Student Skills Development Programme, this section should include any actual or planned attendance at, for example, courses in research methods and advanced subject units from relevant courses in the University and elsewhere, attendance at specified internal and external research events and the like.

**1.6 Section 4: Period of Study**

i. Full-time research requires at least 35 hours per week. Anything less is part-time, which requires at least 12 hours per week.

ii. The *Postgraduate Research Degree Regulations* detail the periods of study for each route in Section 4 and this should be consulted before completing this part of Form R1.

**1.7 Section 5: Statement by the Applicant**

Insert in the printed sentence: ‘MPhil’; ‘PhD via MPhil’; ‘PhD’; or the mnemonic for the professional doctorate award. The applicant must sign.

**1.8 Section 6: Supervision**

**(This section should be completed by the Director of Studies after consultation with the Head of the local organisational unit, the Research Coordinator and the applicant)**

i. The University considers the expertise of the supervising team to be a very important aspect of an application. Supervisors need to be familiar with the research topic, and at least one of them must have had experience of 'successful' supervision. The *Postgraduate* *Research Degree Regulations* (Section 5.1) require that a supervision team shall normally have had a combined experience of supervising not fewer than two students to successful completion. In the case of an application to register for PhD, at least one of the supervisors must have successfully supervised to PhD level.

ii. Read *Postgraduate* *Research Degree Regulation* Section 5 in full. It is usual for the Director of Studies to be a full-time University staff member, since the Director of Studies is expected to supervise the applicant regularly to monitor progress and provide guidance. If the Director is not on the University’s staff, a reason must be given in a covering letter and this should also explain what arrangements have been made for the Director to meet the applicant regularly and frequently. Ensure that the name, qualifications, position and place of work of the Director and Second Supervisor(s) are given, and that the figures showing the numbers of current and previously-supervised successful research degree candidates are inserted.

iii. The CV's of the Director and Second Supervisor(s) need to be provided as appendices unless the individuals concerned have previously been approved as supervisors by the Board of Studies for Research Degrees. The CV should describe the person's research interests, existing and previous research degree supervising and examining experience, and publications. If necessary, the list of publications can be abbreviated.

iv. Please note that an advisor is a person who will advise on particular, specific aspects of the research but is not responsible for the research's overall progress (as a supervisor is). For example, applications may need an advisor for statistical aspects of the research. If an advisor is appointed, a brief indication of the area of advice should be given.

**1.9 Section 7: Recommendation by the Supervisors**

Insert the applicant’s name and the qualification aim in the relevant printed sentence. Each supervisor **must** sign, or alternative documentary evidence must be provided that they recommend registration on the basis of the application and research proposal presented.

**1.10 Section 8: Confirmation of support at local level**

The applicant’s Director of Studies should now secure the signatures of the Research Coordinator and the Head of the local organisational unit in which the applicant is located.

**2. SENDING FORM R1 TO THE UNIVERSITY’S RESEARCH DEGREES ADMINISTRATOR FOR CONSIDERATION BY A LOCAL STANDING PANEL[[5]](#footnote-5)**

i. Number any appendices.

ii. Append to the Form, if required (using a paper-clip not a staple):

a. A covering letter explaining why more than 4 months backdating (for full-time students and part-time students of the PhD by Published Work or Practice), or 6 months backdating (for all other part-time students) is being requested (see ‘Preamble’ above).

b. A covering letter from any collaborating establishment (see ‘Collaborating Establishment’ in 1.4 above).

c. The CV's of the supervisors (see 1.8 above).

d. A letter explaining why the Director of Studies is not a member of University staff and how supervision will function (see 1.8 above).

**THE APPLICANT’S DIRECTOR OF STUDIES SHOULD NOW PASS THE APPLICATION TO THE UNIVERSITY’S RESEARCH DEGREES ADMINISTRATOR SO THAT A CENTRAL RECORD OF THE INITIAL VERSION IS HELD AND SO THAT THE PROCEDURES CAN BE INITIATED FOR CONSIDERATION OF THE APPLICATION BY A LOCAL STANDING PANEL[[6]](#footnote-6).**

**3. ESTABLISHMENT OF A STANDING PANEL**

3.1 The relevant Research Coordinator or other responsible person shall select members for a Standing Panel of the Board of Studies for Research Degrees, following the requirements laid down in the terms of reference of the Board of Studies for Research Degrees.

3.2 The Research Degrees Administrator will arrange for the Standing Panel to convene at its earliest convenience to consider the application for registration.

**4. CONDUCT AND OUTCOMES OF STANDING PANEL MEETING**

4.1 The Standing Panel Chair should outline the procedures to be followed, the criteria against which the application is to be judged, and the reporting process. The Director of Studies or other supervisor present should then be invited to introduce the proposal.

4.2 The Standing Panel should then consider each section of the application, ensuring conformance with the requirements and criteria given in these guidelines and on the R1 Form. The agenda for the Panel meeting should be shaped by these guidelines, which in turn parallel the structure of the R1 Form. Any supervisor(s) present may contribute to the discussion.

4.3 The Standing Panel should pay particular attention to:

i. the accuracy of the title;

ii. the clarity of the aim(s) and their relationship with the previous and proposed work;

iii. whether the literature review indicates familiarity with current literature;

iv. whether the research methods and proposed work are appropriate and clearly described;

v. whether the plan of work is clear and reflects the aim(s);

vi. whether the research is practically feasible in the time;

vii. in the case of a PhD proposal, whether there is a clear indication of the anticipated original contribution to knowledge to be made by the research;

viii. the expertise and experience of supervisors.

4.3 At the conclusion of the discussion the Standing Panel will formulate its conclusions and a recommendation to be forwarded to the Board of Studies for ratification. The outcomes of a Standing Panel meeting may be to recommend:

i. Approval of the application, with recommendations as appropriate.

ii. Referral of the application for amendment and/or further work, for which the Standing Panel discussion and written report will provide guidance.

iii. Rejection of the application for stated reasons and an advised course of action.

Supervisors are requested to relay relevant information to the applicant subsequent to the meeting.

4.4 A brief written report of the Standing Panel meeting will be prepared by the Administrator, who will arrange for the report to be approved by the Standing Panel Chair and then circulated to Standing Panel members, the applicant’s supervisors, the applicant, and the Secretary to the Board of Studies for Research Degrees. Supervisors should discuss the content of the report with the applicant as soon as is practicable.

4.5 Any minor amendments which the Standing Panel determines are absolutely necessary before the application can be accepted may be approved by the Standing Panel Chair, who should signify approval by signing the revised application.

4.6 Major revisions will probably require further scrutiny by the Standing Panel, potentially (but not necessarily) through a further meeting (to be agreed at the previous meeting), before approval can be given and the final application signed by the Chair of the Standing Panel.

**5. CONFIRMATION OF APPROVAL BY THE STANDING PANEL**

5.1 The Chair of the Standing Panel should sign Form R1 only after final approval by the Standing Panel or by the Chair on the Standing Panel’s behalf, i.e. following any referral for further work, absolutely essential minor amendments, or resubmission and reconsideration of the application following initial rejection.

5.2 Once approved at local level, the Standing Panel’s report and recommendations have to be confirmed by the Board of Studies for Research Degrees. Supervisors and students should be aware that the Standing Panel must meet and any amendments to the application must be approved, before consideration of the Standing Panel report by the Board of Studies.

**6. SENDING THE APPROVED FORM R1 AND THE STANDING PANEL REPORT TO THE SECRETARY OF THE BOARD OF STUDIES FOR RESEARCH DEGREES**

6.1 The Chair of the Standing Panel should arrange for the final, approved and signed R1 Form and approved Standing Panel report to be passed to the Research Degrees Administrator. The Research Degrees Administrator will inform the applicant’s supervisors and the applicant of approval and pass a copy of the final, approved and signed application and Standing Panel report to the Secretary to the Board of Studies for Research Degrees.

6.2 The Secretary will arrange for the final Standing Panel report to be considered by the next meeting of the Board and for the report and the final R1 Form to be placed in the student's centrally held file.

**7. CONSIDERATION BY THE BOARD OF STUDIES FOR RESEARCH DEGREES**

7.1 The Standing Panel’s report will be distributed to members of the Board as part of the papers for the next available meeting of the Board.

7.3 The Board of Studies will consider the Standing Panel’s report and recommendations and, subsequent to the resolution of any queries raised and any action deemed necessary, will seek to ratify the Standing Panel’s recommendations, which will under most circumstances lead to registration for the intended award.

**BOARD OF STUDIES FOR RESEARCH DEGREES: ASSESSMENT SUMMARY FOR STANDING PANEL CONSIDERATION OF STUDENT R1 APPLICATION**

***Panel members should complete this assessment summary and make it accessible to the Panel Chair and Secretary prior to the date of the Standing Panel meeting.***

**Name of Standing Panel member: Date of Standing Panel*:***

**Student’s name: Date on R1 form:**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **CRITERION** | **YES/NO** | **COMMENTS/SUGGESTIONS IF “NO”** |
| **1.** | **Is the title accurate?** |  |  |
| **2.** | **Are the aims and their relationship with the previous and proposed work clear?** |  |  |
| **3.** | **Does the literature review indicate familiarity with current literature?** |  |  |
| **4.** | **Are the research methods and proposed work appropriate and clearly described?** |  |  |
| **5.** | **Is the plan of work clear and does it reflect the aims?** |  |  |
| **6.** | **Is the research practically feasible within the proposed timescale?** |  |  |
| **7.** | **(For PhD) Is there a clear indication of the anticipated original contribution to knowledge?**  |  |  |
| **8.** | **Is the expertise and experience of supervisors appropriate?** |  |  |
| **9.** | **Overall judgement\*** |  |  |

***\*The overall judgement should be whether the proposal is of the scale, scope, quality and standard expected of research towards the degree of PhD or MPhil***

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| **GUIDANCE AND PROCEDURES FOR THE PREPARATION, SUBMISSION AND CONSIDERATION OF RESEARCH PROPOSALS USING FORMS R1:*****APPLICATION TO REGISTER FOR A RESEARCH DEGREE*** |
| Policy ref: |
| Version number | 2.0 |
| Version date | June 2017 |
| Name of Developer/Reviewer | Andrew T. Graham |
| Policy Owner (Group/Centre/Unit) | R&GS |
| Person responsible for implementation (postholder) | Designated officer in the Standards & Enhancement Office  |
| Approving committee/board | Board of Studies for Research Degrees |
| Date approved | 17 October 2012 |
| Effective from | October 2012 |
| Dissemination method e.g. website | Website |
| Review frequency | Annual |
| Reviewing committee | Board of Studies for Research Degrees |
| Consultation history (individuals/group consulted and dates) | As above |
| Document history (e.g. rationale for and dates of previous amendments) | Reviewed and updated September 2012; Technical update September 2014, 2017 |

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1. Throughout this document the descriptor ‘Form R1’ or ‘Forms R1’ is used to encompass all versions of the Form, i.e. Form R1, Form R1 (PW), Form R1 (Prac), Form R1 (PD). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Depending upon the prevailing organisational structure of the University, the local organisational unit might be a Faculty, Institute, School, Centre, Subject Department, Group, Field, Area or Division, or any other organisational unit which is constitutionally empowered to undertake the relevant activities. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See the *Research Degree Regulations, Sections* 2.1-2.2 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. If supervision or advice is being provided in an independent capacity, then a written agreement must be drawn up governing the supervisor’s or advisor’s duties, time commitment and any remuneration, to be signed by the Head of the relevant local organisational unit and the supervisor/advisor. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For Professional Doctorate Candidates, the R1 is considered by the assessment board constituted for the purpose in the relevant academic department and the outcomes passed to the Board of Studies for Research Degrees for formal approval. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The University’s Research Degrees Administrator will communicate with relevant central and local staff to facilitate these procedures. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)