



**University of
Leicester**

ACADEMIC AND RESEARCH SERVICES

Code of Practice for Research Degrees

2009/10

UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

CODE OF PRACTICE FOR RESEARCH DEGREES

Introduction

This code applies to candidates applying for admission to a research degree at the University and to all students registered for a research degree regardless of mode of study or place of residence and to staff responsible for the supervision of such students. It should be read in conjunction with the Postgraduate Regulations. The Code also applies to students registered for University of Leicester research degrees at associated colleges, although these may, in addition, have their own codes of practice.

Admission and Selection

1. All applications will be considered in line with the University's Code of Practice for Admissions.
2. The University's minimum entry requirement for a research degree is normally a first degree with at least upper second class honours or an equivalent qualification.

For a candidate who does not meet this requirement the department should make a special case to the Admissions Office for referral to the Graduate Dean based on one or more of the following:

- a) previous training and experience;
 - b) published work;
 - c) upper second class strengths shown in relevant courses in their first degree;
 - d) the student having passed a qualifying examination of final honours standard.
3. For candidates undertaking a research degree on a part-time basis, the department in which he or she wishes to register must be satisfied that the student will have access to the necessary resources and training, and that it is able to provide supervision at a distance.
 4. Where a candidate is resident in the UK or undertaking study in the UK at the time of application an interview may form part of the selection process. If an interview is held at least two members of the academic staff of the relevant department(s) must be in attendance. In cases where an interview is not held departments should have fair and rigorous procedures in place to take account of academic requirements and supervisory capacity. Departments should also ensure that students have access to appropriate research training materials and the facilities necessary to undertake their research.

5. A recommendation to admit a candidate should be endorsed by two members of the academic staff of the department(s) concerned, one of whom shall normally be the Postgraduate Tutor and the other the proposed supervisor. The Postgraduate Tutor works with the Head of Department to proactively seek supervisors for prospective research students to ensure that the best possible research students are recruited.

The recommendation for admission will normally be as an Advanced Postgraduate Student, except where students are to be registered for a research degree with a taught element (Doctor of Education, Doctor of Social Sciences, Doctor of Engineering or Doctor of Clinical Psychology).

6. The detailed requirements for the proposed programme of research frequently cannot be specified in advance, but in making the recommendation for an offer of a place the Head of Department should confirm the following points in the light of the proposed field of study and discussions with the student:
 - a) that the candidate is appropriately qualified for the proposed programme of research;
 - b) that, on the information available, the proposed programme of research should be capable of being studied to the depth required to obtain the degree for which the candidate will be registered;
 - c) that it might reasonably be expected that the proposed programme of research be completed and a thesis submitted within the maximum period of registration for the degree for which the student will be registered;
 - d) that, in so far as can be predicted, appropriate resources (e.g. library, computing, laboratory facilities, equipment, technical assistance and supervision (including alternative supervision to cover temporary absences of staff) will be available.
7. The formal offer of admission can only be made by the Admissions Office based on the recommendation of the department. The recommendation of the department must include a brief outline of the proposed research study programme which will be incorporated into the University's offer letter. Departments may informally notify the student of their recommendation provided that this clearly indicates that the recommendation is subject to final approval by the University.

Designation of Supervisor

8. Departments must specify the supervisory arrangements including the name of the main supervisor at the time it recommends an offer is to be made. Departments are strongly encouraged to operate a thesis committee system for their students or an equivalent method. A thesis committee is likely to include:
 - (i) a main supervisor, who carries primary responsibility for supervision;
 - (ii) a second supervisor or advisor who can offer further academic advice;

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- (iii) the Department's Postgraduate Tutor (or her/his nominee) who is involved in monitoring progress but is independent of the supervisory team.

Departments must be able to supervise the number of students they accept in relation to the resources available and all other demands on staff. The main supervisor must be a member of the academic staff of the University or be a Recognised Teacher from an Associated Institution under the provision of Ordinance 29.

9. The advantage of the thesis committee system is that there is a single point of contact (the main supervisor), but there are also others who are familiar with the student's work and can support and monitor progress. For example, if a main supervisor is temporarily unable to continue supervising a student, the second supervisor or advisor can assume the role of the main supervisor.
10. A member of staff under probation should not usually be appointed as the sole supervisor. However, in order to promote research in new areas and to assist in building up research teams, it may be appropriate to appoint a suitably qualified probationer as the main supervisor. In such cases, the supervision should be monitored and assisted by a senior member of staff. More generally, the appointment of a member of staff on probation as a joint supervisor is to be encouraged in the interests of staff training and development.
11. There may be occasions where it is appropriate to appoint an additional supervisor who is not a member of staff of the University. The appointment of associate supervisors requires the approval of the Graduate Dean. In cases where an associate supervisor is appointed it should be clear that full control over the supervision rests with the University and there must always be a named supervisor who is a member of the academic staff of the University.

Supervision of Students on Industrial-based Projects

12. Where a student is undertaking a research degree based in industry or another organisation an associate supervisor should be appointed to provide advice to the student on a day-to-day basis. The Head of Department should ensure that such a supervisor is appropriately qualified and experienced to undertake the supervision. Before the project has commenced the University should ensure that there is a clear agreement in writing on the following issues:
 - the roles of the respective supervisors, noting that ultimate responsibility for supervision and monitoring of progress rests with the University
 - the academic and industrial objectives of the project
 - the resources, facilities and equipment which will be made available to the student
 - the schedule of industrial and research training, including an agreement on the periods the student will be required to attend the University
 - a schedule for regular tripartite meetings between the student and supervisors

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- the use which will be made of the research and its results, including publications and any issues of confidentiality, intellectual property rights or other areas of sensitivity.

Choice of Research Topic

13. The translation of field of study to a more specific research topic should be undertaken following consultation between the student, the designated supervisor(s) and the student's thesis committee as soon as possible in light of what is appropriate for the discipline and not later than the time of transfer to a specific research degree. The discussions of this may precede registration. The supervisors have a responsibility to ensure that delay in determining the topic is kept to a minimum and that the Head of Department is kept informed. In many disciplines the choice of research topic may be determined by the research in progress within the department or by an external funding body. Industrial needs may in appropriate circumstances influence the choice of research fields and topics.

Induction

14. Departments should provide a formal induction programme for all newly registered research students. Students should be introduced to the necessary resources for their work (e.g. library facilities, computing etc.) and there should be a thorough discussion of both the demands of the research programme and the mutual obligations of student and supervisor in line with the regulations and this code of practice. Students should also be provided with information on the research interests of members of staff and how research is organised in the department, including, for example, details of any research seminars.
15. Supervisors of part-time students, registered either in the UK or overseas, should discuss the local facilities required to undertake the research and should advise how students may gain access to these facilities, providing appropriate documentation where required.

Research Training

16. Departments are required to provide formal research training for all research students to ensure that they acquire and enhance the skills they require to undertake their research successfully. Research training may be provided by a variety of means, but will usually include attendance at Graduate School and College training programmes in addition to research training programmes offered at departmental level or equivalent provision for those undertaking their studies at a distance. Each student and supervisor should formally agree the requirements at the commencement of the student's studies in consultation with the student's thesis committee, and this should be documented in a Training Plan completed and agreed at the first thesis committee meeting. Part-time students should be encouraged to attend the training courses provided but departments should also provide alternative ways for students to acquire the necessary skills, for example through the use of distance learning materials.

17. Departments will be required to provide details of their research training programme to the Graduate Dean each year as part of their annual reports on research students. Research training programmes should include:
- research skills and techniques
 - research environment
 - research management
 - personal effectiveness
 - communication skills
 - networking and team-working
 - career management
18. All research students are required to complete the research training agreed with their thesis committee which is formulated according to the needs of the student and is likely to include compulsory elements designated by the department or college. A formal record of all training undertaken should be maintained by the student, with reference to the Training Plan, since the student will not be allowed to transfer from APG status to a named degree unless the Graduate Dean is satisfied that appropriate research training has been undertaken.

Supervision

19. Research students should be left in no doubt as to what is required of them. In particular, it must be emphasised that a thesis should be the student's own work and that, within the framework of supervision, students have the responsibility for bringing forward and developing their own ideas. A clear understanding between student and supervisor needs to be established at an early stage about the supervisor's responsibilities in relation to the student's written submissions. The understanding must cover the nature of guidance or comment a supervisor will offer within the general principle that a thesis must be the student's own work.
20. Supervisors should ensure that all students understand the requirements of the degree for which they will be registered. Particular care should be taken to ensure that international students, whether registered full-time or part-time resident overseas, fully understand the concept of a British research degree, particularly requirements relating to originality and the viva voce examination associated with research degrees.
21. In the case of part-time students resident outside of the local region supervisors should ensure that there are adequate means available whereby formal consultation can take place on a regular basis. Use should be made of all forms of technology, such as e-mail to facilitate this process. Supervision should take place on a regular basis and may include visits by the student to the University or by the supervisor to the student as appropriate. Individual programmes may also have requirements for attendance at residential schools.

22. Where students are undertaking research as part of a team the supervisor should ensure that students are fully aware of how their own research fits into the group as a whole. It may be particularly useful to arrange regular meetings to review the relationship between individual and group research.
23. The *responsibilities of the supervisor* include:
- a) emphasising to the student the need for familiarity with the code of practice and postgraduate regulations;
 - b) giving guidance about:
 - the nature of research and standard expected
 - the planning of the research programme
 - literature and sources
 - attendance at taught classes, including the research training programme
 - requisite techniques (including arranging for instruction where necessary)
 - the need to develop oral and written communication skills
 - the problems of plagiarism (including drawing attention to the appropriate regulations)
 - c) monitoring the progress of the research through regular consultations in accordance with departmental and University policy, and in light of discussion of arrangements with the student;
 - d) being accessible at mutually convenient times when the student may need advice;
 - e) giving detailed advice on the necessary completion dates of successive stages of the work so that the whole may be submitted within the scheduled time. The planning of the research programme should anticipate a final draft of the thesis being prepared by the end of a three-year period of full time research or an equivalent period for part-time study.
 - f) emphasising the importance of timely submission both in terms of good academic practice and in relationship to University and research council requirements and explaining the consequences of failing to meet the appropriate deadlines;
 - g) requesting written work as appropriate, and returning such work with constructive criticism and in reasonable time;
 - h) reading the whole of the final draft of the thesis, giving advice about appropriate length and ensuring that the thesis complies with regulations on the length of theses;
 - i) arranging as appropriate for students to talk about their work to staff or at graduate seminars, and to have practice in oral presentations, bearing in mind the demands of the oral examination;

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- j) ensuring that the student is made aware of inadequacy of progress or of standards of work below that generally expected. If at any time the supervisor is of the opinion that the student is unlikely to achieve the degree for which the student is registered, the supervisor must notify the Head of Department in writing without delay.

24. The *responsibilities of the student* include:

- a) familiarising themselves with this code of practice and postgraduate regulations;
- b) taking the initiative in raising problems or difficulties, however elementary they may seem;
- c) discussing with the supervisor the type of guidance and comment found most helpful;
- d) agreeing a mutually convenient schedule of meetings;
- e) attending the research training programme and any other taught classes as required by the department;
- f) maintaining and sustaining the progress of the work in accordance with the stages agreed with the supervisor, including in particular the prompt presentation of material, written in good, clear English, as required in sufficient time for comments and discussion before proceeding to the next stage (in this context written material includes interim reports, drafts of theses, running commentaries on the evolution of the argument, appraisal of written sources, laboratory results);
- g) complying with departmental reporting procedures and providing an annual progress report to the Graduate School;
- h) taking the initiative to contact other students in the research area and arrange and take part in informal discussions alongside more formal research activities;
- i) deciding when to submit the completed thesis, taking due account of the supervisor's opinion which is, however, advisory only. The supervisor's support of the decision to submit must not be taken as any guarantee that the degree sought will in fact be awarded. The recommendation to award rests entirely with the examiners;
- j) ensuring that the thesis complies with all regulations including those relating to format and maximum lengths;
- k) ensuring timely submission of the thesis to comply with University and Research Council requirements.

The Role of the Postgraduate Tutor

25. Each Head of Department must appoint a *Postgraduate Tutor*. In order to avoid conflict of interests where students are supervised by the department's Postgraduate Tutor, the Head of Department should appoint another member of staff as postgraduate tutor for these students. The *Postgraduate Tutor* works with the Head of Department to negotiate and meet the University's admissions targets for research students and is responsible for assisting with

the building and maintenance of the critical mass of research students within the Department. The *Postgraduate Tutor will be responsible* for:

- research student recruitment, including seeking supervisors and thesis committee members
- establishing and organising departmental progress monitoring procedures
- co-ordinating annual assessments and reports to the Graduate Office, particularly the transfer of registration at the end of the APG period
- working with supervisors to ensure timely completion and thesis submission
- ensuring that research students follow University regulations and any requirements specified by funding bodies, such as the Research Councils
- monitoring student participation in research training during the APG period
- implementing and monitoring the effectiveness of this Code of Practice within the department
- overall pastoral care of research students
- mediating on any disputes between supervisors and student
- acting on the student's behalf before appropriate University authorities
- informing all postgraduate students of his/her functions and availability for consultation
- ensuring regularity of contact between supervisors and students.

Reporting Procedures

26. Departments are required to operate a formal procedure for the assessment of progress for each research student which includes the following components:

- a) twelve months (twenty-four months for part-time students) after initial registration full time students will be required to submit a progress report with components, such as literature surveys and conclusions to preliminary research questions, which reflect their work to date. The report should also contain a research plan for the remaining period of registration, including research objectives, methods and an approximate time plan for reaching these objectives by the end of the maximum registration period.
- b) the report will be read and assessed by the supervisors and at least one other member of the academic staff. The student will then attend an oral examination or present a seminar in the department and answer questions. The assessment of the examination or seminar will form the basis of the recommendation from the department to the Graduate Dean for transfer of registration from Advanced Postgraduate status to a named research degree, an extension of APG status or termination of registration.

- c) twenty-four months after registration full-time students' progress will be assessed by the supervisors and co-examiner of the first year report. This assessment will include a careful study of the further work needed for completion of the thesis and an agreement of a time scale for completion.
- d) each student, supervisor and Head of Department is required to make an annual report to the Graduate School on request which will include details of individual students' progress, research training and departmental procedures.

If, at any stage, the supervisor has serious doubts about the ability of students to achieve the degree for which they are registered the Head of Department should be notified immediately. Following consideration of the circumstances the Head of Department may then decide to report the student under the regulation concerned with 'Neglect of Academic Obligations'. In some cases, more supportive procedures (e.g. suspension of registration, reformulation of topic, transfer to a lower degree or mutually agreed withdrawal with open testimonial) may be more appropriate.

Complaints Procedure

- 27. If a student feels that the research programme is not proceeding satisfactorily or legitimate expectations are not being met the student may utilise the University's Complaints Procedures as detailed in the Postgraduate Regulations.

Final Examination

- 28. When a student submits notification of intention to submit a thesis the Graduate Office notifies the relevant Head of Department and requests that an examiners' nomination form be completed. The Head of Department, after consultation with the supervisor, will make a recommendation to the Graduate Dean which, if satisfactory is submitted to Senate for approval.
- 29. There should always be at least two examiners, one of whom must be an external examiner. Internal examiners must be members of the academic staff of the University or hold Recognised Teacher Status. The candidate's supervisor may not act as the internal examiner. If, in exceptional circumstances, it is not possible to appoint an internal examiner a second external examiner must be appointed.
- 30. In cases where the candidate is a member of the staff of the University and there is a possibility that the integrity of the examination may be considered to be compromised by the appointment of an internal examiner, the examination team will comprise two external examiners. An independent Chair will oversee the conduct of the viva voce examination but will not examine the thesis. Examination teams will be approved by the Graduate Dean in the first instance, who will determine whether the appointment of two external examiners is required.

31. In addition to the two examiners a Chair may be appointed for a viva voce examination if the Graduate Dean or either of the examiners considers this appropriate or desirable. For example, the appointment of a Chair may be requested where the examining team has relatively little experience of examining UK research degrees or where there are two external examiners. The Chair will usually be a senior member of the academic staff of the department in which the candidate is registered. He or she will not be required to examine the thesis but will be present to ensure that the viva is conducted in accordance with University procedures and standard practice for the discipline. The Chair will be required to submit a brief written report on the conduct of the viva.
32. The viva voce examination will be held at the University. In exceptional circumstances the viva voce examination may be conducted at another appropriate location, with the permission of the Graduate Dean. The supervisor should be available at the time of the viva voce examination to assist the examiners if required. The supervisor may be invited to be present during part or all of the viva voce examination, at the discretion of the examiners.
33. The internal and external examiners should prepare independent written comments on the thesis prior to the oral examination. After the oral examination, a joint report should be prepared including, where appropriate, an agreed recommendation. Where the original examiners are unable to reach agreement then a further external examiner will be appointed. The joint report accompanied by the examiners' individual reports should be submitted to the Graduate Office.
34. The examiners' recommendations will take one of the following forms:
 - a) immediate award of the degree;
 - b) award of the degree subject to minor amendments to be approved by the internal examiner within one month of the viva;
 - c) award of the degree subject to major amendments to be approved by the internal examiners within six months of the viva;
 - d) for revision (with detailed advice about requirements) and resubmission for the original or lower degree (re-submission to take place within 6 months to 12 months as recommended by the examiners);
 - e) award of a lower degree;
 - f) fail with no right of re-submission.
35. In recommending either resubmission (for the original or lower degree) or the award of a lower degree the examiners may take the wishes of the candidate into account. Although this can be discussed at the time of the oral examination, the student should not be required to give an immediate decision but should be given a reasonable time for reflection. The student's preference should be made known to the examiners prior to their recommendation being submitted to the Graduate Office. It should be made clear to the student that the examiners are not bound to follow the student's preference.

Appeals

36. Any student whose registration is terminated or who is recommended for the award of a lower degree or who is recommended for resubmission for a lower degree will be notified of the University's appeal procedures by the Graduate Office. These procedures are set out in the Postgraduate Regulations.

Conferral

37. All degrees will be conferred at the degree congregation immediately following the formal award of the degree by the Senate of the University.