

Research Degrees

Professional Doctorate Framework

Professional Doctorates are available as an Open University Qualification delivered via three routes:

1. as an Open University delivered programme
2. as an Open University award delivered by an Affiliated Research Centre
3. as an Open University validated award through accredited institutions

All three streams need to satisfy the following criteria:

Where it is proposed that the Professional Doctorate is offered in Partnership with another organisation/institution the partnership should have prior approval. Each new award should map and define the respective responsibilities of the University and the partner organization against the relevant sections of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education:  Chapter B11: *Research Degrees* and Chapter B10: *Managing Higher Education Provision with Others.* The partnership will be underpinned by a written agreement setting out the respective roles and responsibilities of the parties in relation to the professional doctorate.

Entry requirements and regulation

* Must fully adhere to the stipulations set out in the Professional Doctorate Regulations.
* Entry requirements: A Masters Degree would normally be required and a minimum of two years relevant professional experience.
* Candidates admitted are employed by a recognised professional practice.
* All stakeholders must adhere to responsibilities set out in the student handbook and codes of professional practice pertaining to their profession.
* The qualification must map to the skills students are required to achieve at the end of the programme (defined by QAAs 2015 Characteristics Statement Doctoral Degree).

Purpose

* Fulfil a demonstrated need and link with the proposing faculty’s research priorities.
* The programme will place an emphasis on research and skills relevant to the professional practice in which the Doctorate is rooted with strong engagement with practice and application of skills.

Taught Elements and delivery

* Delivered as a part-time programme only (as stipulated in the Professional Doctorate Regulations).
* Maximum duration of the programme is 6 years and students are permitted to submit their thesis after 3 years (but only once they have completed and passed all of the taught elements of the programme).
* Include taught elements in addition to the research dissertation. The taught element should be completed within the first two years of the programme and take the form of structured elements such as lectures, seminars, and workshops delivered via face to face or online sessions, as well as online learning materials that will provide a mixture of academic discipline as well as professional practice.
* Include postgraduate study equivalent to a minimum of three full-time calendar years.
* Where the programme is delivered at a partner institution where elements are organized in terms of credit units, then the taught programme and research thesis must comprise a total of 540 Credits at FHEQ level 8. Where the programme is not delivered with credit based elements, the content and weighting of the taught programme and research thesis should equate to or be the equivalent of 540 Credits at FHEQ Level 8.
* Provide participants with opportunities to acquire and develop skills and competence in a range of areas, including: research skills and techniques, research environment, research management, personal effectiveness, communication skills, networking and team working, career management.
* The taught elements of the programme will enable a student to develop theoretical understanding and practical application of contemporary research methods to professional practice.
* Students will attend/be provided with a programme on skills and topics relevant to doctoral study and career development.
* Students will also attend/be provided with discipline specific training that ensures: emphasis on skills relevant to the professional practice in which the Doctorate is rooted.
* The programme will also provide other forms of learning support such as e-learning, tutorials, peer learning and assessment and so on, as appropriate.
* Training should be delivered within the first two years of the programme and should comprise these areas:
  + Induction
  + Principles of Research Design
  + Approaches to Data Collection
  + Planning for Data Analysis
  + Evaluating Research
  + Research Design and project planning
  + Skills Development Planning- RDF
  + Ethics, Integrity, Data Protection
  + Academic writing- literature Review
  + Communicating your research
  + Preparing for viva
  + Reflections on career progression and development
  + Discipline Specific Training
  + Professional Practice
  + Key concepts of specific discipline/field
  + Applying concepts to professional practice

A full list of possible training modules are contained within **appendix 1**.

External Stakeholder Engagement/Input Employers

* Supervision will be across the academic institution and the professional practice.
* Ongoing engagement with stakeholders should be made at key points through the programme and involvement should also be sought in areas such as training.

Assessment

* There may be a requirement for students to pass structured elements of the programme before progressing. Formal evaluation of progress in these circumstances may involve summative assessment. A pass/fail or a mark or grade is given; such assessments may act as incremental hurdles for the candidate as part of his/her progress towards the independent research project. How a student will remedy failed taught elements should be stipulated at individual programme approval level.
* Probation will be assessed via the completion of taught elements (e.g. skills and competencies) and research capabilities. A component of the taught element should include the development and assessment of the research proposal for the thesis as defined by each award. Completion of probation will be approved through Research Degrees Committee.
* The assessment will be by presentation and defense of thesis (*viva voce*), a thesis of no more than 55,000 words. This should include the extent to which the candidate understands current techniques in the discipline, through demonstrating engagement with and use of research methods and how they inform professional practice, and also their research contribution and application of this to professional practice. It will also have an emphasis on producing original research and must be an original significant contribution to professional practice. QAA Characteristics of Professional Doctorates: *Output involves practice-related materials. Research projects located within the candidate's profession. The candidate's research may result directly in organisational or policy-related change*. Previous work does not count nor can it be submitted

APPENDIX 1 **List of possible training modules**

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| **Principles of Research Design** | Intro to social research |
| Principles of Quantitative Methods |
| Principles of Qualitative Methods |
| ESRC day school- An introduction to mixed methods research |
| ESRC day school- 'Doing Interdisciplinarity' |
| Logics of enquiry/foundations of knowledge and main theories in epistemology |
| **Approaches to Data Collection** | Fieldwork with people |
| Questionnaire design and administration |
| Big data |
| Semi-structured interviews |
| Ethnographic and case study methods |
| Experimental methods in the social sciences |
| Discourse analytic methods |
| Participants as co-researchers |
| Visual and creative methods |
| Using secondary data |
| Online ethnographies |
| Grounded Theory |
| Survey methods/Qualtrics |
| **Planning for Data Analysis** | CORE DAY SCHOOL- Planning for data analysis (qual/quant streams) |
| **Evaluating research** | Evaluating qualitative research (for non-specialists) |
| Evaluating quantitative research (for non-specialists) |
| **Getting started** | Intro session on getting started on your research degree |
| Skills Development Planning - an introduction to the RDF Researcher Development Framework |
| Why do we need an ethics review process? The advantages for the researcher. |
| Planning for research data management |
| Project Planning |
| Using bibliographic packages- session on Endnote and Mendeley |
| Research Design and Focus |
| PhD Survival Guide |
| **Academic Writing** | Process, Text Types and Communities |
| Undertaking a lit review |
| Being 'critical' in academic writing: building towards the literature review |

APPENDIX 1b, cont… **List of possible training modules**

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| **Communicating your research** | Undertaking research presentations part 1 |
| Social media for scholarly communications and networking |
| Impact and Engagement 1 |
| Preparing conference presentations- part 2 |
| Impact and Engagement 2 |
| Getting published for students and the review process |
| Impact and Engagement 3 |
| Impact and Engagement 4 |
| Impact and Engagement 5 |
| Poster competition (or equivalent) |

**Appendix 2. Mapping of the Professional Doctorate Programme against the QAA Indicators in Chapter B11.**

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| **QAA B11 Indicator** | **Professional Doctorates Provision** |
| Indicator 1 Higher education providers that are research degree awarding bodies have regulations for research degrees that are clear and readily available to research students and staff, including examiners. Where appropriate, regulations are supplemented by similarly accessible, subject-specific guidance at the level of the faculty, school, department, research centre, or research institute. | The OU has Research degree Regulations that also include Professional Doctorate specific regulations.  The Professional Doctorates Framework aims to provide supplementary guidance to all faculties, research centres and institutes, as well as stipulating the minimum content and standards that are required of a Professional Doctorate programme. Additionally, individual programmes will require approval to ensure that the content meets the Framework standards and adheres to the regulations. |
| Indicator 2 Higher education providers develop, implement and keep under review codes of practice for research degrees, which are widely applicable and help enable the higher education provider meet the Expectation of this Chapter. The codes are readily available to all students and staff involved in research degrees, and written in clear language understood by all users. | The Framework ensures that there are guidelines that are widely applicable, to ensure that they are not too restrictive in stipulating what is required of a Professional Doctorate programme. It also ensures a level of parity between Professional Doctorate programmes and a level of content and standards to adhere to. The Framework will be readily available once approved so that all staff involved in research degrees can access it. The language used in the Framework paper is also clear to enable those faculties wishing to develop their own Professional Doctorate programme to be able to easily follow and understand what should be included in their programme. |
| Indicator 3 Higher education providers monitor their research degree provision against internal and external indicators and targets that reflect the context in which research degrees are being offered. | In devising the Framework, the current EdD and the validated DPsych has been taken into account to ensure that there is alignment of what we currently provide with what we wish to provide in the future. The Framework also takes account of the OU regulations. In creating the Framework there was also work undertaken to look at lessons learned within the OU to understand what needs to be considered/avoided in creating new curriculum. There was also research undertaken to look at competitors’ provisions and HESA data to ensure that the current climate and context of Professional Doctorates was considered. |
| Indicator 4 Higher education providers accept research students only into an environment that provides support for doing and learning about research, and where excellent research, recognised by the relevant subject community, is occurring. | The Professional Doctorates Framework ensures that the research environment is appropriate and supported correctly due to the emphasis on required training/teaching of key skills and appropriate levels of application to professional practice as well as the required supervisory support from the practice in question. |
| Indicator 5 Higher education providers' admissions procedures for research degrees are clear, consistently applied and demonstrate equality of opportunity. | The Framework and the regulations ensure that admission procedures are clear and that students accepted on to the programme have the relevant background and connection/placement in the industry in order to apply their practice techniques. |

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| **QAA B11 Indicator** | **Professional Doctorates Provision** |
| Indicator 6 Only appropriately qualified and prepared applicants are admitted to research degree programmes. Admissions decisions involve at least two members of the higher education provider's staff who have received training and guidance for the selection and admission of research degree students. The decision-making process enables the higher education provider to assure itself that balanced and independent admissions decisions have been made in accordance with its admissions policy. | As above. |
| Indicator 7 Higher education providers define and communicate clearly the responsibilities and entitlements of students undertaking research degree programmes. | The Framework ensures that a programme is developed that is clearly defined and providing the appropriate mechanisms of assessment and progression for those undertaking the programme. |
| Indicator 8 Research students are provided with sufficient information to enable them to begin their studies with an understanding of the environment in which they will be working. | Students undertaking the Professional Doctorate programmes will already be in employment/self-employed at the place that they will be carrying out their research and applying their learnt techniques and practices. The Framework stipulates that there must be a taught element to the programme which ensures that all students have a level of understanding of the methods and techniques that they will need to utilise and ensure that they have sufficient expertise to undertake, and build upon, their research from the outset and throughout the taught stage. The Framework also requires that the students complete the taught element at the beginning of their programme which enables students to have all the training required, in order to work towards their thesis, as early as is practicable. |
| Indicator 9 Higher education providers appoint supervisors with the appropriate skills and subject knowledge to support and encourage research students, and to monitor their progress effectively. | The Framework stipulates that students must have academic and industry supervisors to ensure that students are provided with the appropriate skills and knowledge by the Open University and by the organisation in which they are placed. This also ensures that students are monitored in the two areas in which they will work to ensure that they are progressing appropriately in both domains. This also ensures that the industry/organisation has involvement with the OU and the programme. |

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| **QAA B11 Indicator** | **Professional Doctorates Provision** |
| Indicator 10 Each research student has a supervisory team containing a main supervisor who is the clearly identified point of contact. | This is a requirement of the regulations and of the programme, as it is for all PhD programmes at the OU. |
| Indicator 11 Higher education providers ensure that the responsibilities of research student supervisors are readily available and clearly communicated to supervisors and students. | The Framework stipulates that this must be clearly defined by the proposers of the individual programmes when they are seeking approval. |
| Indicator 12 Higher education providers ensure that individual supervisors have sufficient time to carry out their responsibilities effectively. | The Framework stipulates that this must be clearly defined by the proposers of the individual programmes when they are seeking approval. |
| Indicator 13 Higher education providers put in place clearly defined mechanisms for monitoring and supporting research student progress, including formal and explicit reviews of progress at different stages. Research students, supervisors and other relevant staff are made aware of progress monitoring mechanisms, including the importance of keeping appropriate records of the outcomes of meetings and related activities. | The Framework stipulates that all Professional Doctorates must follow the requirements stipulated in the OU regulations. There must be a form of assessment and way of passing probation and this must be clearly defined by the proposers of the individual programmes when they are seeking approval. |
| Indicator 14 Research students have appropriate opportunities for developing research, personal and professional skills. Each research student's development needs are identified and agreed jointly by the student and appropriate staff at the start of the degree; these are regularly reviewed and updated as appropriate. | The Framework stipulates that all Professional Doctorates must follow the requirements stipulated in the OU regulations i.e. Training Needs Analysis and that there must also be a provision in the training for developing research, personal and professional skills. This must be clearly defined by the proposers of the individual programmes when they are seeking approval. |
| Indicator 15 Higher education providers put in place mechanisms to collect, review and respond as appropriate to evaluations from those concerned with research degrees, including individual research students and groups of research students or their representatives. Evaluations are considered openly and constructively and the results are communicated appropriately. | Professional Doctorate students will be provided with the same feedback mechanisms that are currently open to, and utilised by, current PGR students. |

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| **QAA B11 Indicator** | **Professional Doctorates Provision** |
| Indicator 16 Higher education providers that are research degree awarding bodies use criteria for assessing research degrees that enable them to define their academic standards and the achievements of their graduates. The criteria used to assess research degrees are clear and readily available to research students, staff and examiners. | The Framework stipulates that all Professional Doctorates must follow the requirements stipulated in the OU regulations i.e. the requirements of a thesis and its examination. The Framework also stipulates that there must be a form of assessment and a way of passing probation, and these must be clearly defined by the proposers of the individual programmes when they are seeking approval. |
| Indicator 17 Research degree final assessment procedures are clear and are operated rigorously, fairly, and consistently. They include input from an external examiner and are carried out to a reasonable timescale. Assessment procedures are communicated clearly to research students, supervisors and examiners. | As above. External examiners must meet the criteria stipulated by the Professional Doctorate Regulations. |
| Indicator 18 Higher education providers put in place and promote independent and formal procedures for dealing with complaints and appeals that are fair, clear to all concerned, robust, and applied consistently. The acceptable grounds for complaints and appeals are clearly defined. | Professional Doctorate students will be provided with the same Complaints and Appeals procedures that are currently open to and utilised by current PGR students. |