

Postgraduate Research Code of Practice

Regulatory Context

The Northumbria Postgraduate Research (PGR) Code of Practice is annually reviewed and updated by the Graduate School Committee (GSC). This Code is based around the [QAA UK Quality Code, Advice and Guidance: Research Degrees](#) which articulates a set of principles that apply across the UK. These are not regulatory requirements in England, but are intended to provide a framework of guiding principles when looking at higher education provision.

Guiding Principles

The Code of Practice is split up under six guiding principles laid out in the QAA UK Quality code for research degrees with an additional final section on monitoring an evaluation.

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.

Academic

Explicit academic frameworks and regulations, policies and guidance for Research Degrees are made available to prospective and current research students and staff on the [Postgraduate Research Degrees webpage](#) and the [Graduate School intranet site](#). This includes:

- Academic Regulations:
 - [Academic Regulations for Research Awards \(including PhD Professional Doctorates and MPhil\)](#)
 - [PhD by Published Works Regulations](#)
 - [Higher Doctorates Regulations](#)
 - [PGR Academic Misconduct Regulations](#)
- [Handbook of Student Regulations](#)
- PGR Code of Practice
- Handbooks and Frameworks:
 - [Postgraduate Research Student Programme Handbook](#)
 - [PGR Supervisor Handbook](#)
 - [Doctoral Candidate Good Practice Framework](#)
 - [Doctoral Supervisor Good Practice Framework](#)
 - [Northumbria University: Framework for Quality and Standards](#)

For Research Degree Programmes, these arrangements are managed on behalf of Academic Board by Graduate School Committee. The [Graduate School Committee Terms of Reference are available here](#). Graduate School Committee routinely reviews all formal documentation on an annual basis, and puts major formal changes to Academic Board for approval in June each year.

Admissions

Research opportunities are only advertised and offered where students can be trained and supported within an environment which is supportive of research. Annually, Faculties establish their capacity to deliver PGR Degree programmes. Their case is directly linked to Faculty Research and Innovation Plans and Academic Development Plans.

All entry to study is subject to meeting the eligibility requirements and successfully completing the full application and selection process (normally including an interview with two academic members of staff) as described at: <https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/research/postgraduate-research-degrees/how-to-apply/>

The University provides support to applicants in their selection and preparation of projects at application stage.

At admission, the Pro-Vice Chancellor (or nominee) nominates the Principal Supervisor, undertakes to provide a full supervision team and undertakes to provide all the required resources to support the programme and to which the student is entitled i.e. individual or shared workspaces; IT resources; library facilities; fieldwork and collaboration support; opportunity to meet other PGR students.

Ethical Approval

Northumbria University strives to uphold the highest standards of ethical practice in research and academic integrity. Irrespective of the nature and ethical complexity of a research project, staff and students are expected to ensure that their conduct is driven by the ethical imperative of respect, the intent to do no harm and to contribute to society's knowledge and practice through engagement in research that has beneficent intent. Postgraduate Research Students must complete a mandatory 'PGR Ethics Training' session in the first 12 months, before Annual Progression (Year One), and before research commences. More information can be found on the [Ethics and Integrity webpages](#).

Complaints and Appeals

Guidance for raising a complaint or appeal is explained in Annexes 1 - 5 (Research Programmes) of the [Handbook of Student Regulations](#).

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.

Northumbria University is committed to creating an inclusive culture where we take pride in, and value, the diversity of our postgraduate research students. We encourage and welcome applications from all members of the community. The University holds a bronze Athena Swan award in recognition of our commitment to advancing gender equality, we are a Disability Confident Leader, a member of the Race Equality Charter and are participating in the Stonewall Diversity Champion Programme. We also hold the HR Excellence in Research award for implementing the concordat supporting the career Development of Researchers and are members of the Euraxess initiative to deliver information and support to professional researchers.

Interview Panel Chairs will have attended the University's Recruitment and Selection Training and relevant Equality and Diversity Workshops. All applications are treated confidentially and in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations and Freedom of Information Acts.

Students have access to all the information required to commence and progress their studies with an understanding of the academic and social environment within which they will be working. Each student engages in formal induction at Faculty and, where appropriate, Department level, and is given appropriate electronic access to the University IT network. The [Postgraduate Research Student Programme Handbook](#) provides students with information about their programme and where to find help and support. The [Doctoral Candidate Good Practice Framework](#) also provides expectations and things to consider as students develop their working relationship with their supervisory team.

Support is provided to Postgraduate Research students to ensure that they meet their milestones and submit in a timely manner. Throughout the programme, in the event that a Postgraduate Research student encounters any circumstance, for personal, technical or research-based reasons, which they, and potentially their supervisor, feel may affect their ability to perform as normal within assessments, a student may request an extension to a submission or an interruption in study. The process for submitting a PGR Circumstances Affecting Progress form to the Graduate School should be followed and further details are available at:

https://livenorthumbriaac.sharepoint.com/sites/slas/gs/Pages/PGR_Circumstances.aspx

3. Supervisors are appropriately skilled and supported.

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.

Every PGR Student has an identified single point of contact who is the Principal Supervisor. In addition to the Principal Supervisor, there will be a supervisory team which will encompass the breadth of academic, pastoral, and skills knowledge and experience. This ensures that PGR students receive sufficient support and guidance to facilitate their success.

The team of supervisors are appointed by the PGR Director or Programme Lead, to provide subject expertise, research experience and supervision skill. All Faculties use standard processes which address the criteria for supervisor appointment. All supervisors are trained to the required level specified by the University and have access to information and support through the [PGR Supervisor Handbook](#) and the [Doctoral Supervisor Good Practice Framework](#). Supervision teams may be changed, provided that the quality of the supervision team is maintained in accordance with the regulations.

Further information about Supervision of the Programme can be found in Section 7 of the [Academic Regulation for Research Awards](#).

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.

All PGR students have access to a flexible researcher development programme, organised at University level, to provide the skills needed to successfully complete their doctorate. The PGR Training is mapped against the Vitae Researcher Development Framework and supports PGRs in four key areas: knowledge and intellectual abilities; personal effectiveness; research governance and organisation; and engagement, influence and impact. Both Mandatory and Optional training is provided for all PGR students. Further information can be found on the [PGR Training webpages](#).

The University Library also offers different training for researchers and research students. More information can be found on the [Library website](#).

Students have access to a Conference Bursary scheme which is for students who will be presenting their research at a conference. The maximum award is £400. Full information can be found on the [Conference Bursary page](#).

The details of the Professional Development and Research Training undertaken by the student are updated regularly in their on-line record in preparation for the appropriate milestone.

Within the Annual Progression process, students submit (for approval) details to show that the Professional Development and Research Training specified at the Project Approval stage is on-going and has been completed satisfactorily to date and an appropriate planned and relevant programme is in place.

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.

All students registered for research degrees are required to make satisfactory and timely progress throughout the programme and meet the University requirements for Project Approval and Annual Progression.

Further information about Progression and Assessment through the programme can be found in Section 5 of the [Academic Regulation for Research Awards](#).

Graduate School and Faculty PGR Directors and PGR Leads meet monthly to review student progress and identify and respond to any issues highlighted.

Attendance of each student at the University, whether Home or International, is formally monitored and recorded at formal supervision meetings between the student and their Principal Supervisor. Students complete on-line supervision records, which forms part of the Attendance Monitoring process. For international students based at the University Campus, failure to complete the monthly report may lead to the University reporting this absence to the UK Visa and Immigration as 'non-attendance' at the University, as required by the Home Office.

For all PGR students, failure to attend or absence without permission can result in serious consequences for the student through the Unsatisfactory Academic Progress Procedures given in the [Handbook of Student Regulations](#). The University also has a legal obligation to monitor the attendance and engagement of its international students under its Student Route (formerly Tier 4) licensing agreements.

For more information, please see the [Student Attendance and Engagement Monitoring Policy](#).

Responsibilities of students in relation to their programme are set out in the [Postgraduate Research Student Programme Handbook](#) and the [Doctoral Candidate Good Practice Framework](#). Responsibilities of supervisors are set out in the [PGR Supervisor Handbook](#) and the [Doctoral Supervisor Good Practice Framework](#).

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.

Project Approval and Annual Progression are formal assessment points (see Section 5).

On completion of the student's programme of research, Postgraduate Research assessment comprises examination of the student's submission, followed by a viva voce (oral) examination of the student. For Professional Doctorate programmes, a submission may be either a thesis or a portfolio. At least three months before the end of the student's period of active research, Faculties verify that all outstanding procedural requirements have been met and nominate examiners who are considered and approved by the Faculty PGR Director on behalf of Graduate School Committee.

Assessment processes are clear, and operated rigorously, fairly, transparently, consistently and supportively. Examiners, students and Faculties use standard University processes and forms which ensure a clear and sequential outcome of both stages of the examination process, to identify and address problems at the earliest opportunity.

Students are required to attend a mandatory PGR Training session to help them prepare for their viva voce examination.

Further information about Examinations can be found in Sections 8 – 10 of the [Academic Regulation for Research Awards](#).

Monitoring and Evaluation

Providers with research degree provision are expected to monitor and evaluate their provision against internal and external indicators and targets that reflect the context in which research degrees are being offered.

The Graduate School formally assures the Graduate School Committee in an annual report that Postgraduate Research Programmes are operating in accordance with the University's Research Degree Regulations and PGR Code of Practice. The annual report includes:

1. Operation of the PGR training programme
2. Operation of PGR examinations, through the Research Degrees Committee and the administration of the Graduate School.

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3. Statistical evidence of timely and satisfactory process, including submission and completion rates.
4. Supervision data, including engagement with mandatory training.
5. Appeals, Complaints and Academic Misconducts.
6. Applications and Enrolment.

Graduate School Committee assesses the annual report and thus determines whether programme management is satisfactory, or not, and makes recommendations for enhancement or improvement. Graduate School Committee annually reports to Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee.

Feedback from students is formally sought at various points during their registration, for example following induction or training sessions. A University-wide system of Postgraduate Research student representation also ensures an appropriate route for Postgraduate Research student feedback. Information about this is published at: <https://mysu.co.uk/student-voice/pgr>

In addition, the University fully engages with the Higher Education Academy's Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES). The results of each biennial survey are analysed and presented to Graduate School Committee. Faculties are then required to provide Graduate School Committee with formal proposals to address any areas of development identified from the survey. The Graduate School also uses the PRES results to address any areas of development identified in its role supporting Postgraduate Research students. An appropriate University-wide action plan is prepared, and actions taken in response to Postgraduate Research students' comments.