Guidance on the Procedure for the Approval of New Postgraduate Research Degrees

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Research Office Graduate Education Team

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1.   SCOPE

This procedure and the associated pro-formas should be used when seeking approval for new research degree programmes that lead to a named award of the University.

The PhD is a University award and it would not be necessary or appropriate for each new PhD subject to be approved. This process is designed for other types of new research degree such as new awards under the professional doctorate title, variations of research master's programmes and PhD awards that involve an alternative or distinct method of research presentation.

This document provides general guidance on what is required to approve a new research degree. Faculties may make minor modifications to the requirements, as appropriate, depending upon local requirements. This process will also need to be adapted depending upon the nature of the proposed new programme, as some sections may not be appropriate for certain types of research degrees.

This process has been developed using the approval of taught programmes process as a guide. Feedback on the appropriateness of this process for research degrees is welcomed and should be forwarded to the Faculty Graduate Administrator in the first instance. Faculties are requested to refer major comments or issues on the process to the University's Research Office.

2.   SOURCES OF SUPPORT

Student Recruitment, Admissions and Widening Participation Division: for help with market research into the demand for a programme.

Your Faculty Quality Administrator and/or Graduate Administrator: for advice on each stage of the approval process. For amendments to existing programmes, advice will be given on the level of approval needed (School or Faculty) depending on the degree of change, and advice provided on the documentation required.

Administrative staff within your School: for support with the preparation of documentation.

3.   AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME APPROVAL PROCESS

There are normally two stages to the procedure for approving a new research degree programme. The first stage is to gain approval in principle for the development of the programme. This stage essentially approves the business case for a programme proposal and ensures that it fits strategically with the School, the Faculty and the University. Therefore, programme proposers are asked to complete **NRD1 – approval in principle**. The second stage is the development and approval of the detailed structure and content of the programme. Programme proposers are asked to complete **NRD2 – approval of programme content**.

3.1.   Stage One – Approval in Principle

Form NRD1 requires:

- **The rationale for the proposal.** The rationale should set the programme in its School, Faculty, University (*Manchester 2015*) and wider context to enable the academic merit of the proposal to be considered by the School and Faculty.

- **Resources.** If additional resources are required to support the proposed programme then further details should be provided as appropriate by the Head of School and the JRULM Faculty Librarian.

- **Recruitment and Admissions information.** After approval in principle is granted, a programme proposal can be advertised as 'subject to approval'. Therefore, information for the Recruitment and Admissions Office is required. Information should be provided that will be used to advertise the programme.

- **Summary factual information for the proposed programme.** This enables the Student Records Office to establish a provisional record of the programme on the Student Records System.

- **Nomination of an external adviser.** An external adviser should be nominated by the School, approved by the Faculty, and asked by the School to provide feedback on the academic coherence of the new programme during the drafting of the NRD2 submission. The external adviser acts as a critical friend. S/he should be a subject specialist but should not be a current External Examiner (although an external adviser may go on to be nominated as an External Examiner). Please see annex 1 for further information.

It is important to note that approval in principle is a commitment to develop the proposed programme. Applications for approval in principle should be submitted as early as possible in order to allow sufficient lead-in time for the full development, approval and marketing of the programme.

3.2.   Consideration of Approval in Principle (NRD1)

Proposers of postgraduate research programmes are required to consult with their Associate Dean (Graduate Education) regarding the proposal during completion of the NRD1 pro-forma. When signing the NRD1 form the Head of School should check that the proposal has been discussed with the Associate Dean (Graduate Education).

The completed NRD1 pro-forma must be agreed at School level (either through committee or by Chair's action) and signed by the Head of School before it can be considered at Faculty level. If the proposal involves contribution from other schools, a note of their approval must also be included with the submission.

The pro-forma asks for a four-digit JACS code and these are available from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) at www.hesa.ac.uk. The JACS coding frame has a hierarchical structure which allows programme coding at varying levels of detail. Schools are requested to code programmes at the most detailed level possible, e.g. C810, *Applied Psychology* or C812, *Educational Psychology*, rather than use the wider group C800, *Psychology*. Please try to avoid catch-all codes such as G690, *Software engineering not elsewhere specified*. Should you have any queries regarding JACS please contact the Planning Support Office on 52447.

The pro-forma also asks proposers to specify whether the programme is HEFCE-funded. A programme is classed as eligible for HEFCE funding if it meets all the following conditions:
- the programme leads to an award, or credits that can be counted towards one, that is recognised to be at HE level
- the programme is open to any suitably qualified candidate

- the programme is not being supported from any other EC public source (e.g. the NHS, the Home Office)

Please contact the Planning Support Office on 52198 if you have any queries regarding programme funding.

Once completed, the pro-forma should be forwarded to your Faculty Administrator who will arrange for it to be considered by the appropriate Faculty committee. The programme proposer or his/her representative/s should normally be present at the meeting of this committee in order to answer any queries. The Faculty committee will decide either to give approval in principle for the programme proposal, or to refuse approval in principle on the grounds of strategic or resource issues. In the latter case, the School will be given feedback and informed whether a revised proposal can be resubmitted.

The Faculty Administrator will ensure that a copy of the approved NRD1 pro-forma is signed by the Chair of the Faculty committee and forwarded to:

- Head of Student Records
- Director of Student Recruitment, Admissions and Widening Participation
- JRULM Faculty Librarian
- Director of International Development
- Head of Graduate Education

Staff in the Research Office will prepare a summary of all programme proposals that have been approved in principle for the Associate Vice-President for Graduate Education. This summary will be copied to the Graduate Education Group (GEG).

3.3.   Stage Two – Approval of Programme Content

Stage two of the process will continue to be supported by the Faculty Administrator and involves developing the detail of the proposal.

Form NRD2 requires:

- A programme specification is required for the new programme. There should also be course unit specifications for all course units.

- An overview of how the programme will be managed.

- Information on teaching, learning and assessment methods for taught units. A statement of how these methods meet the needs of students with disabilities and details of placement learning (where applicable) should also be included.

- Information about subject specific and generic skills training and how this will be managed.

- Information about personal development planning and how this will be managed.

- Details about the supervision arrangements and confirmation that all students will have access to a Tutor/Adviser.

- Comments from the external adviser. Evidence of feedback from the external adviser, plus the response from the School where appropriate, must be included with the submission to demonstrate that he or she has taken part in this process.

- A revised NRD1 pro-forma if anything has changed from the original approval in principle. This is essential to ensure that the information held by the Student Records Office and Recruitment and Admissions Office is accurate.

3.4. Consideration of the Programme Content (NRD2)

The complete NRD2 submission must be agreed at School level (either through committee or by Chair's action) and signed by the Head of School before it can be considered at Faculty level. If the proposal involves contributions from other Schools, a note of their approval must also be included with the submission.

The NRD2 submission should be forwarded to your Faculty Administrator when the proposer and any internal advisers are satisfied with the proposal. The programme submission will be copied to all members of the appropriate Faculty committee and will be considered in detail by the Chair: by this stage, the internal advisers will normally be able to recommend to the committee that the submission should be approved. The decision of the committee will either be 'approved' or 'not approved'. However the iterative nature of the programme approval process should mean that a 'not approved' decision is given only in exceptional circumstances.

If the submission is approved, it is forwarded to the Associate Vice-President for Graduate Education, via the Head of Graduate Education, for ratification on behalf of Senate. The Associate Vice-President for Graduate Education will not expect to consider the submission in detail, but will wish to see whether it raises policy issues or may impact on other Faculties. Where appropriate issues may be referred to the Graduate Education Group for consideration. Following ratification by the Associate Vice-President, staff in the Research Office will send an e-mail and hard copy confirmation that the programme content has been fully approved to:

- The Faculty Administrator
- The Head of School
- Head of Student Records
- Director of Student Recruitment, Admissions and Widening Participation
- Director of International Development
- Head of Academic Quality

Staff in the Research Office will prepare a summary of all programme proposals ratified by the Associate Vice-President for receipt by Senate.

If the submission is not approved by the Faculty committee, then the proposal may be amended and resubmitted to the committee. Clear feedback will be provided to the School on the actions necessary and the timeframe for resubmission.

3.5. Timetable for the Approval Process

The timeframe of the programme approval schedule will be tailored to meet the demands of the environment in which programmes are offered. Proposals can be considered quickly and out of the Faculty committee cycle provided that the Faculty is satisfied that the development of a coherent proposal will not be compromised.

Annex 1: External Advisers

Comments from at least one external adviser are normally required as part of the approval of the detailed content of a programme.

The external adviser should be nominated by the School and approved by the Faculty at the approval in principle stage. The programme proposer will ask him/her to provide feedback on the academic coherence of the new programme during the drafting of the NRD2 submission. The external adviser acts as critical friend. S/he should be a subject specialist but should not be a current External Examiner (although an external adviser may go on to be nominated as an External Examiner). The specific time/s at which the feedback from the external adviser will be requested by the School will be agreed between the proposer and the Faculty Administrator.

Comments from an external adviser should be more than an indication that the proposal is "interesting" and must therefore include some analysis of and comments on the academic content and structure of the programme. An external adviser should be asked to make reference to:

- the appropriateness of the programme aims, learning outcomes and content in relation to relevant subject benchmark statement/s (where they have been published);
- the relationship of the programme to the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications;
- the relationship of the programme to any other external reference points.

The external adviser should therefore be a senior academic at another higher education institution. There may be cases where it is also appropriate to use an external adviser and for this adviser to be from industry.

On receipt of written feedback, the Faculty will make a payment of £100 to each external adviser.

It is anticipated that the external adviser's comments will provide constructive advice to the programme team and therefore that they will be taken into account during the development of the programme. However there may be instances when the programme team consider the comments but decide not to incorporate certain elements into the proposal. In this case the programme proposer must include a covering note of explanation.

In case of any delays in receiving comments from an external adviser, a second nominee will be considered by the Faculty.