

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

December 2019

Research Degrees and Researcher Development

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1. Scope

This procedure and the associated pro-forma should be used when seeking approval for new research degrees 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 degree, 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 Degrees and Researcher Development Team.

2. Sources Of Support

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

Your Faculty Quality Administrator and/or Graduate Administrator: for advice on each stage of the approval process. For amendments to existing degrees, 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 Degree Approval Process

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

3.1. Part One – Approval in Principle

Form requires:

- **The rationale for the proposal.** The rationale should set the degree in its School, Faculty, University (*Manchester 2020*) and wider context to enable the academic merit of the proposal to be considered by the School and Faculty.

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- **Resources.** If additional resources are required to support the proposed degree 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 degree 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 degree.
- **Summary factual information for the proposed degree.** This enables the Student Records Office to establish a provisional record of the degree 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 degree during the drafting of the Part Two 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 degree. 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 degree.

3.2. Consideration of Approval in Principle (Part One)

Proposers of postgraduate research degrees are required to consult with their Associate Dean (Postgraduate Research) regarding the proposal during completion of the Part One of the pro-forma. When signing the pro-forma the Head of School should check that the proposal has been discussed with the Associate Dean (Postgraduate Research).

The completed pro-forma (part one) 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.

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 degree 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 degree 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 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 Research Degrees and Researcher Development

Staff in the Research Office will prepare a summary of all degree proposals that have been approved in principle for the Associate Vice-President for Postgraduate Research. This summary will be copied to the Manchester Doctoral College Strategy Group (MDCSG).

3.3. Part Two – Approval of Degree Content

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

Form requires:

- A degree specification is required for the new degree. There should also be course unit specifications for all course units.
- An overview of how the degree 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 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 Degree Content (Part Two)

The complete 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 submission should be forwarded to your Faculty Administrator when the proposer and any internal advisers are satisfied with the proposal. The degree 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 degree approval process should mean that a 'not approved' decision is given only in exceptional circumstances.

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If the submission is approved, it is forwarded to the Associate Vice-President for Postgraduate Research, via the Head of Research Degrees and Researcher Development, for ratification on behalf of Senate. The Associate Vice-President for Postgraduate Research 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 Research Degrees and Researcher Development Team 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 degree 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 degree 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 degree approval schedule will be tailored to meet the demands of the environment in which degrees 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 degree.

The external adviser should be nominated by the School and approved by the Faculty at the approval in principle stage. The degree proposer will ask them to provide feedback on the academic coherence of the new degree during the drafting of Part Two of the submission. The external adviser acts as critical friend. They 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 degree. An external adviser should be asked to make reference to:

- the appropriateness of the degree aims, learning outcomes and content in relation to relevant subject benchmark statement/s (where they have been published);
- the relationship of the degree to the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications;
- the relationship of the degree 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 degree team and therefore that they will be taken into account during the development of the degree. However there may be instances when the degree team consider the comments but decide not to incorporate certain elements into the proposal. In this case the degree 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.