

RESEARCH DEGREE POLICY DOCUMENTS

Document 10 Approval of New Research Degree Awards or Changes to Research Degree Programmes

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The approval process for new research degree programmes and changes to existing provision aims to ensure that the quality and standards of research degree programmes are maintained and that they comply with the wider research agenda of the University. An additional aim is to ensure consistency of practice across the University in its approval of award-bearing programmes and to enable the University to identify and share areas of good practice.

An application for the approval of a new research degree programme will be required if:

- a new research degree programme is proposed, such as a new professional doctorate, in the absence of current provision
- amendments are proposed that make a significant change to the market, viability or educational purpose of an existing research degree programme
- an alternative mode of delivery of an existing programme is proposed.

- 1.2. The University's Regulations for research degrees should be consulted when the development of any new research degree programme is proposed. A list of approved research degree programmes can be found in the [University Calendar](#).

Any new proposal or an amendment to existing provision will be considered in relation to:

- The University's research strategy, the UEA Plan and UEA Vision 2030
- The University's Research Degree Education Strategy
- The University's Code of Practice for Research Degrees
- The complementarity of the proposal in relation to other current or planned provision leading to an award of the University.

- 1.3 In this document, unless explicitly stated otherwise, Head of School may be taken to refer also to the Chair of the NBI Graduate School Executive for research degree programmes wholly or primarily based in the Norwich Bioscience Institutes.

2. Approval Process

- 2.1 The Academic Lead for the proposal should consult with the Head of the Postgraduate Research Service prior to starting the course approval process for information on early considerations and timescales, and to assign a Postgraduate Research (PGR) Officer/Manager to provide advice on completing the necessary documentation. If the proposal is for a new degree award not previously offered by the School/Institute¹/University, this should be flagged to the Finance, Governance and Planning Office at an early stage.
- 2.2. The approval process is staged and risk-based. The approval for **Low Risk** proposals is devolved to Faculty Graduate School Executives, differing from the approval of **Standard Risk** proposals which are usually accompanied by a business case and financial plan and where more widespread consultation and sign-off by the University's Learning and Teaching Committee is required.
- 2.3 The initial idea is articulated in the Course Proposal Outline (CP1R), and once that has School/Institute approval, the next stages can commence. Course Approval forms, for use for both new research degree programmes and changes to existing programmes, are available from the [Postgraduate Research Service website](#).
- 2.4 Approval of a new research degree programme or amendments to an existing programme will consist of up to three stages. The stage or stages of the approval process that are applicable will depend on the level of risk determined. Guidance and full details are incorporated within the approval forms themselves. Stage 1 (Course Proposal Outline) is necessary for all applications. Stage 2 (Business Case and Financial Plan) is only required for proposals designated as standard risk. Stage 3 (Academic Design) is required for all standard risk proposals and for low risk proposals where the academic content (including research environment) is changing.

3. Risk Categories

The Faculty Associate Dean for Postgraduate Research responsible for the School where the proposal originates will assign the level of risk in consultation with the PGR Officer / Manager as follows:

3.1 Category One – Existing Content (Low risk proposals)

'Low risk' proposals typically will involve changes to existing provision and therefore the quality assurance risk is low, and there is no financial impact so the financial risk is low. If the proposal is for existing applicants and/or students, these groups may need to be consulted with in line with consumer rights legislation and evidence of the consultation provided; please seek further advice from the PGR Service if necessary. Examples of low risk categories are given below:

¹ The use of the term Institutes in this document refers to the John Innes Centre, The Sainsbury Laboratory, the Earlham Institute and the Quadram Institute Bioscience.

- Amendments to a programme where existing teaching content is re-organised into new modules
- Proposals for a new subject area and/or School of registration within an existing programme
- Amendments to a programme, without a change in degree title, where less than 20% of the whole programme is new or changing
- Changes to existing programmes with Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) accreditation where the accrediting body is content or has recommended the proposed changes
- Changes to the FTE for a part-time programme, provided the total length remains the same
- Minor changes to existing routes within a programme

3.2 Category Two – New Content or Programmes (Standard risk proposals)

‘Standard risk’ proposals typically will be different enough from current provision that the quality assurance risk is high, and/or there is a financial impact so the financial risk is high. Examples of standard risk categories are given below:

- New award not previously offered by the University
- Proposals which require a non-standard mode of delivery e.g. online or distance learning
- Proposals where some or all of the delivery will be delivered off campus (i.e. not on the Norwich Research Park)
- Cross school proposals, where more than 25% of the programme is in another School of study
- Proposals whereby existing research degree programmes are being merged into one
- Amendments to a programme, with or without a change in degree title, where more than 20% of the whole programme is new or changing
- The addition, or significant revision, of a placement component
- Changes in the length of the period of study and/or registration
- Proposals involving collaboration with an external partner (with the exception of co-tutelle arrangements, work-based or placement learning)
- Proposals which require PSRB accreditation
- Major changes to existing routes within a programme

3.3 Affiliated Graduate Schools²

For proposals originating from an Affiliated Graduate School the level of risk will be determined by the Academic Director of Research Degree Programmes and the Head of the Postgraduate Research Service in consultation with the Chair of the Affiliated Graduate School Executive and the relevant PGR Officer / Manager.

² Graduate Schools that are currently affiliated are the Norwich Bioscience Institutes (NBI) Graduate School and the University of Suffolk Graduate School.

4 Approval Stages

Each stage of the approval process entails as follows:

4.1 Stage 1 Course Proposal Outline

- The Academic Lead completes a Course Proposal Outline form (CP1R) setting out details of the proposed award or amendment including key features of the new/revised programme, any market intelligence gathered, how it fits with the School/Institute plans and a list of modules (where there are taught elements of the degree);
- The consideration of the Course Proposal Outline by the Head of School to make informed decision about whether to support a new programme development or programme amendment;
- The determination of the level of risk to the University posed by the proposal by the Faculty Associate Dean for Postgraduate Research;
- The consideration of the proposal by the Faculty Associate Dean PGR and the Head of the PGR Service, in consultation with the Faculty Associate Dean (Admissions) and the Admissions, Recruitment and Marketing (ARM) Service. All approved proposals categorised as Low risk (Category 1) will progress straight to Stage 3 Academic Design. All approved proposals categorised as Standard risk (Category 2) will proceed to Stage 2.

4.2 Stage 2 Business Case and Financial Plan

- the completion of Business Case (CP2R) and Financial Plan (CP3R) forms, whose purpose is to ensure robust consultation at an early stage in the approval process on market research and marketing, student numbers, target metrics/KPIs, the impact on resources and the projected return on investment;
- The consideration of the Course Proposal Outline, Business Case and Financial Plan by the ARM and Faculty Executives, to help reach an informed decision about whether to support the new programme development.

4.3 Stage 3 Academic Design

4.3.1 Low risk (Category 1) proposals

- Where the academic content is changing some parts of the Academic Design (CP4) form will need to be completed for low risk proposals (these will have been identified in the Course Proposal Outline). If this is the case the Academic Design and Course Proposal Outline will both be considered by the Faculty Graduate School Executive, or by Chair's action by the Faculty Associate Dean for Postgraduate Research if necessary, in consultation with the School / Institute;

- Where the academic content is not changing, the Academic Design (CP4) form does not need to be completed. The Course Proposal Outline will be considered by the Faculty Graduate School Executive, or by Chair's action by the Faculty Associate Dean for Postgraduate Research if necessary, in consultation with the School / Institute.

In both circumstances the approval of the proposal will be reported to the University's Postgraduate Research Executive.

4.3.2 Standard risk (Category 2) proposals

- The full Academic Design form (CP4R) should be completed for all standard risk (Category 2) proposals. The Academic Design comprises the Programme Specification or equivalent documentation (which will be published on the programme web pages post-approval), additional information regarding the academic content of the programme including, if applicable, a completed Module Outline for any taught modules, and a log of considerations and sign-off/approval by the relevant executives/committees;
- The consideration of the Course Proposal Outline, Business Case, Financial Plan and Academic Design by the School/Institute PGR Director and relevant Graduate School Executive(s);
- Detailed scrutiny of all approval documentation by the Postgraduate Research Executive, who will consider aspects such as: the intended learning outcomes and the appropriateness of the intended award in relation to the Quality Assurance Agency's Framework for Higher Education Qualifications; any proposed modules and their status as compulsory and/or optional; the relationship between the learning outcomes of modules and of the programme as a whole and of the envisaged teaching and assessment methodologies (in relation to the learning outcomes); the proposed Doctoral Training Pathway(s) for the programme (or exemption); and equal opportunities;
- Approval of any resulting changes to University Regulations by the Postgraduate Research Executive Consideration by the Learning and Teaching Committee, in full or by a subcommittee, which when satisfied confirms completion of the process and hence final approval to the Head of the PGR Service and to the School(s) / Institute(s) concerned.