

Guidance on the quality framework for doctoral training entities

This guidance provides a summary of the University's quality framework and how it relates to doctoral training entities. It covers the following areas:

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. The University contains a diverse range of externally funded [doctoral training entities](#). These entities follow various models including those supported through Research Councils and through charitable trusts, such as the Wellcome Trust. Specialised training for PGR students is a defining feature and, in some cases, this involves a credit-bearing taught component.
- 1.2. Doctoral training entities must connect with the quality framework. This framework provides assurance on the quality and academic standards of the University's programmes and awards, as well as creating opportunities to review and enhance provision. The University's regulations and policies meet the current national guidelines as defined by the [Office for Students](#) (OfS) and the [Quality Assurance Agency](#) (QAA).
- 1.3. Both the research and, where applicable, the taught components of doctoral programmes must follow the relevant regulations and policies. The aim of this guidance is to bridge the different strands of the quality framework and to highlight how it relates to doctoral training entities.

2. An overview of the quality framework

- 2.1. The quality framework covers both PGR and taught programmes and consists of four main areas:

Codes of practice

- 2.2. The University sets out regulations and related policy through a series of codes of practice:

- a) The [regulations and code of practice for research degree programmes](#) – the PGR Code – covers PGR programmes.
- b) The [regulations and code of practice for taught programmes](#) – the Taught Code – covers undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes. Relevant sections apply to the assessment of any credit-bearing taught components of PGR programmes.
- c) The [regulations and code of practice for educational collaborative arrangements](#) provides a structure for the development of educational partnerships, including for cross-institutional doctoral training entities.

Programme and partnership approval processes

- 2.3. New or revised units / programmes must be approved to ensure they are academically sound and have sufficient resource available for their delivery. This includes new PGR programmes and taught exit awards from credit-bearing taught

components. More information is available on the [programme and unit approval process](#).

- 2.4. Proposals to set up new educational collaborative arrangements must be approved. Normally, the Division of Research, Enterprise and Innovation (DREI) will run an initial approval process in response to DTE funding calls and colleagues from the Academic Quality and Policy Office (AQPO) will be involved to provide support through the bid development and the subsequent approval of the educational partnership (which is a separate step from the approval to submit a bid to the funding call). Approval for the proposed educational partnership must be in place before student recruitment commences. More information is available on [policies and procedures for educational partnerships](#).

External examining

- 2.5. External examiners provide an informed and independent view of academic standards.
- a) At least one external examiner must be appointed to participate in the oral examination for PGR degrees (see the section on [appointing examiners and independent chairs](#) in the PGR Code).
 - b) At least one external examiner must be appointed for a taught programme or for a credit-bearing component that leads to, or forms part of, an award of the University (see the [policy on external examining for taught programmes](#)).

The quality review process

- 2.6. The University's quality review process provides a system for monitoring and reflection. It comprises three main elements:
- a) [Annual programme review](#) is an opportunity to monitor and reflect on provision regularly at the school, programme, or entity level. These reviews feed into the education action plan (EAP) process.
 - b) An [education action plan](#) is an iterative document where significant actions are recorded, monitored, and addressed.
 - c) The [University Quality Team](#) (UQT) reviews the quality and standards of provision and student academic experience, including a review of education action plans. A UQT panel reviews provision in each faculty in a two-year cycle. The Faculty of Arts, Law and Social Sciences in the first year of the cycle and the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences and the Faculty of Science and Engineering in the second year.

3. Quality assurance roles in doctoral training entities

- 3.1. A doctoral training entity must designate someone to be responsible for quality assurance and for its relationship to the quality framework. In most cases, the Director of the entity will hold this responsibility but with appropriate delegation in place where needed. There are also formal roles related to taught components and to partnerships.
- 3.2. A Programme Director must be appointed if there is a credit-bearing taught component. The Programme Director must be familiar with relevant regulations and is responsible for the quality assurance of the programme. There is [guidance](#) available for this role.
- 3.3. An Academic Lead must be appointed if there is a collaborative partnership with other organisations. This would typically, but not necessarily, be the Director of the entity. The [regulations and code of practice for educational collaborative arrangements](#) sets out the responsibilities of the Academic Lead.
- 3.4. Some doctoral training entities operate across schools and/or faculties. For quality assurance purposes, an entity that is cross-school or cross-faculty, would be owned by one school and faculty. This would normally be the school and faculty where the Director of the entity is based.

4. The PGR Code

- 4.1. The [regulations and code of practice for research degree programmes](#), the PGR Code, sets out the rules covering the lifespan of a PGR student's time at the University, from admission to award.
- 4.2. The PGR Code covers the following areas:
 - a) [Introduction](#)
 - b) [Programmes, registration and the period of study](#)
 - c) [Student entitlements and responsibilities](#)
 - d) [Skills development and the research environment](#)
 - e) [Supervision](#)
 - f) [Progress and review arrangements](#)
 - g) [Assessment: dissertations, exams and outcomes](#)

- 4.3. If external funders have terms and conditions in relation to how funded research degree programmes are run, those terms and conditions will be in addition to the regulations and policies set out in the PGR Code.

5. Taught components

- 5.1. The [regulations and code of practice for taught programmes](#), the Taught Code, is applicable for credit-bearing taught units and components of PGR programmes. A doctoral training entity must follow the Taught Code for the assessment any credit-bearing taught components it delivers.
- 5.2. If a doctoral training entity provides specialised training that is not credit bearing, the Taught Code is not relevant to them.
- 5.3. A doctoral student who is undertaking a credit-bearing taught component is still registered as a PGR student and so are primarily under the PGR Code. It is only for the assessment of the taught component that they are covered by the Taught Code.
- 5.4. A doctoral student who fails a mandatory credit-bearing taught unit after their reassessment attempt will be required to withdraw from their doctoral programme if the unit is required for progression.
- 5.5. A doctoral student who leaves before completing their research project may be eligible for a taught exit award if this is a permitted outcome on their programme and if they have accrued sufficient credit from a taught component.
- 5.6. The relevant parts of the Taught Code for a credit-bearing taught component are:
- a) [Programme design and types](#)
 - b) Assessment rules, covering [purpose of assessment](#), [setting of assessment](#), [impact of student circumstances](#), [feedback to students](#), [marking criteria and scales](#), [marking, moderation and anonymity](#), [penalties](#), [academic misconduct](#), [processing and recording marks](#)
 - c) Progression rules, covering [roles responsible for progression and awards](#), [calculating marks](#), [confirming student outcomes \(exam boards\)](#), [academic outcomes in taught postgraduate programmes](#), [results release](#).
- 5.7. An external examiner must be appointed for a credit-bearing taught component and is covered by the [policy for external examining for taught programmes](#).
- 5.8. The taught component aims to prepare the student for research, and it is often integrated with the doctoral project the student will go on to do. Smaller research project/s conducted as part of the taught component might, for example, be linked to the proposed doctoral project.

- 5.9. Students are normally required to obtain the necessary credit points as set out in the programme specification to progress from the taught component. An exam board must therefore give formal approval for progression from a credit-bearing taught component. It is however recognised that there might be a lag between a PGR student being ready to move forward with their research project and when the results from the taught component are approved. A student may start their project in these circumstances on the understanding that progression is provisional until the results are officially confirmed.
- 5.10. The Taught Code acknowledges that some programmes are designed so that the taught component runs in parallel with the research project. For these programmes, a progression point is not required. In these cases, there should be a formal consideration on whether the student is likely to succeed with their doctoral project at a point determined by the programme.

6 Setting up and changing taught exit awards

- 6.1 A PGR programme that contains a credit-bearing taught component can include taught exit awards (a taught Masters, a Postgraduate Diploma, and a Postgraduate Certificate). As for any taught programme, a taught exit award must follow the [programme approval process](#).
- 6.2 New DTEs are required to follow DREI's level-3 bid process, and information pertaining to the taught component is provided at an early stage of the bid process. Full academic approval is required if the bid is successful and the doctoral training is delivered in partnership with another Higher Education Institution or organisation, and/or if there is a taught component included as part of the programme structure. An Academic Case that outlines the programme aims, its structure, intended learning outcomes and the units must be developed and approved at University level. Information on approved taught programmes is published in the [unit and programme catalogues](#).
- 6.3 Changes to existing programmes with a taught component and units are also considered through the programme approval process. Most programme and unit changes are approved at faculty level but might require further approval if there are major changes that come with a financial risk or a risk to the student experience. Changes to units and programmes are managed through the [Unit and Programme Management System](#) (UPMS).
- 6.4 Contact approval-help@bristol.ac.uk for further guidance about the approval process.

7. Educational collaborative arrangements

- 7.1 Approval of an educational collaborative arrangement is required if a programme or unit learning outcome is dependent on the involvement of an external partner/s.

This involvement, for example, might consist of teaching, assessment, supervision, placements, and/or specialist facilities or equipment. The [regulations and code of practice for educational collaborative arrangements](#) cover the lifecycle of these collaborations.

- 7.2 A doctoral training entity that involves other organisations in the delivery, support or assessment of their programmes must follow the rules on educational collaborative arrangements. For doctoral training entities wishing to collaborate with a partner/s, DREI will coordinate an initial approval process that focusses on the reward and risk of working in partnership and the relative contributions of each partner. AQPO is a stakeholder in the DREI process and will provide input and support into the bid development to ensure that any funded doctoral training entity aligns with the University Quality Framework.
- 7.3 AQPO will arrange for approval of the operational detail of the educational partnership through the University Academic Quality and Standards Committee (and where this is linked to a new credit-bearing programme proposal will do so in conjunction with the new programme being approved). Following this approval, AQPO will work with the Secretary's Office to put in place an educational partnership contract agreement.
- 7.4 Large-scale educational collaborations, such as those involving doctoral training entities, must have a signed collaboration agreement in place before the relevant activity starts to mitigate risks (including visa compliance for overseas students). The Academic Lead is responsible for the delivery of the educational collaborative arrangement in accordance with the agreement.
- 7.5 For collaborations where students will be based at different locations for parts of their study, a student's registration status and the applicable regulations must be clear. It must also be clear which university will make any permitted exit awards if this is part of a collaboration that contains a credit-bearing taught component.

8 Quality review processes

- 8.1 The [education action plan](#) (EAP) process requires all PGR programmes to conduct an [annual review](#) so that the programme team can reflect collectively and consider improvements. Any significant issues should then be captured in the relevant EAP document.
- 8.2 Each faculty has an EAP document covering PGR provision. This is a live, iterative document to record and monitor progress on issues and their related actions. A doctoral training entity can however have a separate EAP document if this is appropriate. EAP documents are held on the [QA Framework Documents SharePoint site](#).
- 8.3 The [University Quality Team](#) (UQT) reviews the quality and standards of education provision and the student academic experience, including a review of EAP

documents. A UQT panel will be appointed to review each faculty's PGR provision on a rolling basis.