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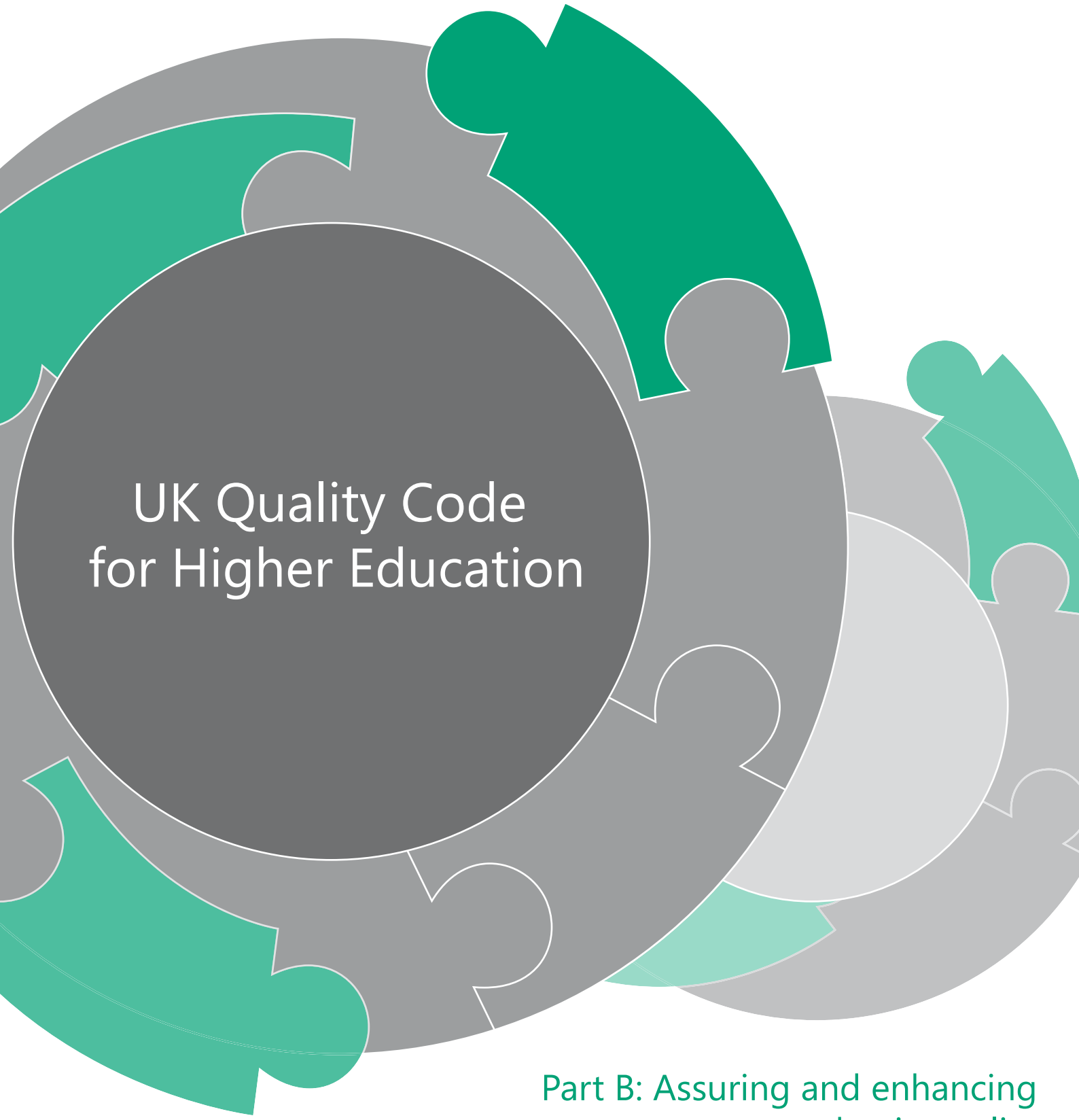


UK Quality Code for Higher Education

Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality

Chapter B11: Research degrees

Contents

About the Quality Code

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) is the definitive reference point for all UK higher education providers.[1] It makes clear what higher education providers are required to do, what they can expect of each other, and what the general public can expect of them. The Quality Code covers all four nations of the UK and all providers of UK higher education operating overseas. It protects the interests of all students, regardless of where they are studying or whether they are full-time, part-time, undergraduate or postgraduate students.

Each Chapter contains a single Expectation, which expresses the key principle that the higher education community has identified as essential for the assurance of academic standards and quality within the area covered by the Chapter. Higher education providers reviewed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) are required to meet all the Expectations. The manner in which they do so is their own responsibility. QAA carries out reviews to check whether higher education providers are meeting the Expectations.[2]

Each Chapter has been developed by QAA through an extensive process of consultation with higher education providers; their representative bodies; the National Union of Students; professional, statutory and regulatory bodies; and other interested parties.

Higher education providers are also responsible for meeting the requirements of legislation and any other regulatory requirements placed upon them, for example by funding bodies. The Quality Code does not interpret legislation nor does it incorporate statutory or regulatory requirements. Sources of information about other requirements and examples of guidance and good practice are signposted within the Chapter where appropriate. Higher education providers are responsible for how they use these resources.

The Expectation in each Chapter is accompanied by a series of Indicators that reflect sound practice, and through which higher education providers can demonstrate they are meeting the relevant Expectation. Indicators are not designed to be used as a checklist; they are intended to help higher education providers reflect on and develop their regulations, procedures and practices to demonstrate that the Expectations in the Quality Code are being met. Each Indicator is numbered and printed in bold and is supported by an explanatory note that gives more information about it, together with examples of how the Indicator may be interpreted in practice.

The *General introduction*[3] to the Quality Code should be considered in conjunction with this document. It provides a technical introduction for users, including guidance concerning the terminology used and a quick-reference glossary.

1 www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/
2 www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/Pages/default.aspx
3 www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Quality-Code-introduction.aspx.

About this Chapter

This publication supersedes the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes* (2004), published by QAA, and forms *Chapter B11:Research degrees* of the Quality Code.

The Chapter was subject to public consultation between January and March 2012 and was published in June 2012. It becomes a reference point for the purposes of reviews carried out by QAA from June 2013.

Higher education providers are responsible for ascertaining which laws and regulations apply to them. To meet the Expectation of this Chapter of the Quality Code, higher education providers may wish to consider the indicative list of reference points, guidance and examples of good practice below.

England

HEFCE guidelines on research degree programmes:
www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/rsrch/howfundr/researchdegreeprogrammes

Research degrees

The Expectation and the Indicators in this Chapter represent the broadly shared view of those responsible for research degrees about the systems, policies and procedures that are conducive to an excellent experience for research students and that support higher education providers in maintaining academic standards for research degrees.

This Chapter of the Quality Code is about doctorates and research master's degrees. It is informed by a wider context in which UK research degrees are offered, including an environment of continuous improvement and the desire to learn from others' experiences in research education. Below is a summary of the context for both doctoral and research master's degrees, including European and international reference points, graduate schools and centres for doctoral training, and international study.

Understanding doctoral degrees

Doctoral degrees are qualifications rooted in original research: the creation of new knowledge or originality in the application of knowledge. The doctorate is therefore unique in the array of qualifications offered by higher education providers. Other key reference points for doctoral degrees are the doctoral qualification descriptors included in the frameworks for higher education qualifications (for England, Wales and Northern Ireland and for Scotland)[4] and QAA's *Doctoral degree characteristics* (2011).[5] The latter identifies significant characteristics relating to the quality and academic standards of research degrees in the UK and internationally. Section 3 of *Doctoral degree characteristics* summarises the most common UK doctoral awards, including the PhD, professional and practice-based doctorates and the PhD by publication.

[4] www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/Qualifications/Pages/default.aspx
[5] www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/doctoral_characteristics.aspx

Section 1.3 of *Doctoral degree characteristics* summarises the development of a regulatory and guidance framework for doctoral degrees in the UK and includes reference to the influence of the funding bodies, and the importance of the doctoral qualification descriptors, in framing the broad academic standards of doctoral degrees and the intended learning outcomes for doctoral graduates. Section 1.3 also emphasises the importance of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) in setting and maintaining standards of doctoral degrees, some of which grant a licence to practise. Development and diversification of the UK doctorate is briefly summarised in section 1.4 of *Doctoral degree characteristics*. UK doctorates have evolved, sometimes in response to professional needs, with a growth in professional doctorate and practice-based award titles that reflect increasing diversity and development of degrees in emerging areas of professional practice. The PhD has also changed over time so that, irrespective of their degree, research students now experience and expect structured research training as part of their programme.

Higher doctorates are not included in this Chapter of the Quality Code; they are defined in section 3.3 of *Doctoral degree characteristics*.

Understanding research master's degrees

Research master's degrees and doctorates are closely linked because of the emphasis in both on independent research. Students may choose to register for a research master's degree either as a stand-alone research qualification or as an entry qualification for a doctorate. A research master's degree may also be awarded if a student does not complete a doctorate, for either personal or academic reasons, but satisfies the academic requirements for a research master's degree.

Master's degrees by research may take up to two years' full-time study and are the only form of master's included in this Chapter of the Quality Code. Taught master's degrees are included in the other Chapters of the Quality Code. Students registered on research master's degrees spend the majority of their programme undertaking independent research with supervision and guidance; they may also attend structured courses to learn about research methods in the field. *Master's degree characteristics* (QAA, 2010)[6] summarises the main features of research master's degrees, including a general description in Appendix 1 of the characteristics relevant to research master's degrees.

For both research master's and doctoral degrees, *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) (2008) and *The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland* (2001)[7] contain qualification descriptors which set out the broad expected outcomes that graduates should be able to demonstrate and the wider abilities that they would be expected to have developed.

Graduate schools and centres for doctoral training

Within the UK, research students are often part of a cohort; as well as having a subject identity, they may belong to a graduate school and/or doctoral training centre. Doctoral training centres and other partnerships help to shape the way that many doctoral students are trained, for example as part of a cohort, because a significant proportion are based on interdisciplinary research activity. Doctoral training centres seek to ensure a flow of highly qualified people into research careers.

[6] www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Masters-degree-characteristics.aspx
[7] www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/Qualifications/Pages/default.aspx

Section 1.5 of *Doctoral degree characteristics* provides more detail about structured research training in both graduate schools and centres for doctoral training.

International study

In international contexts, research students may be studying on overseas campuses of UK higher education providers. This Chapter of the Quality Code applies to all research students registered with a UK provider, including UK and international students, irrespective of the place of study. Parity of experience and outcome is important, including similarly appropriate levels of infrastructure and support at all locations.

Also relevant to the context of UK research degrees are the growing numbers of research students registered on transnational, collaborative or joint programmes. Such arrangements enable increased opportunities through mobility for early career researchers, both within Europe and more widely. *Chapter B10: Management of collaborative arrangements*[8] of the Quality Code contains further guidance about collaboration in educational provision.

Higher education providers are responsible for ascertaining which laws and regulations apply to them. To meet the Expectation of this Chapter of the Quality Code, higher education providers may wish to consider the indicative list of reference points, guidance and examples of good practice below.

UK-wide

QAA (2011) *Doctoral degree characteristics*: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/doctoral_characteristics.aspx.

QAA (2010) *Master's degree characteristics*: www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Masters-degree-characteristics.aspx.

Scotland

QAA Scotland has conducted an international benchmarking exercise on the postgraduate research degree student experience in Scotland: www.qaa.ac.uk/Scotland/DevelopmentAndEnhancement/Pages/International-benchmarking.aspx.

European

A number of non-UK, European reference points are available for research degrees. These include the following:

Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (2005): www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/050218_QF_EHEA.pdf.

Dublin descriptors (2005) - also included as Annex B to the FHEQ.

Salzburg Principles, as set out in the European Universities' Association's (EUA) *Bologna Seminar report* (2005): www.eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/Salzburg_Conclusions.1108990538850.pdf.

[8] www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/quality-code-B10.aspx

Salzburg II Recommendations (this augments the existing Principles): www.eua.be/Libraries/Publications_homepage_list/Salzburg_II_Recommendations.sflb.ashx

The Concordat to support the career development of researchers: www.vitae.ac.uk/CMS/files/upload/Vitae-Concordat-2011.pdf.

The European Charter for Researchers - The Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers: http://ec.europa.eu/eracareers/pdf/am509774CEE_EN_E4.pdf

Definitions

Research

Two general definitions of research have been used to inform the Indicators in this Chapter, especially those relating directly to the research environment. They are the Frascati definition of research from the relevant Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) manual, and the Research Excellence Framework[9] definition to which the UK funding councils subscribe. Both are reproduced below. These are supplemented by definitions used by higher education subject communities to describe excellence in research outputs and outcomes relevant to their academic field.

Frascati definition of research:

> '3. Research and experimental development (R&D) comprise creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications.'
>
> '4. R&D is a term covering three activities: basic research, applied research, and experimental development. Basic research is experimental or theoretical work undertaken primarily to acquire new knowledge of the underlying foundation of phenomena and observable facts, without any particular application or use in view. Applied research is also original investigation undertaken to acquire new knowledge. It is, however, directed primarily towards a specific practical aim or objective. Experimental development is systematic work, drawing on existing knowledge gained from research and/or practical experience, that is directed to producing new materials, products or devices, to installing new processes, systems and services, or to improving substantially those already produced or installed.'[10]

Definition of research for the Research Excellence Framework (REF):

1 'For the purposes of the REF, research is defined as a process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared.'

2 'It **includes** work of direct relevance to the needs of commerce, industry, and to the public and voluntary sectors; scholarship[11]; the invention and generation of ideas, images, performances, artefacts including design, where these lead to new or substantially improved insights; and the use of existing knowledge in

[9] www.ref.ac.uk

[10] Second chapter of the *OECD 1993 Frascati Manual* (reference: ISBN 9264142029)

[11] Scholarship for the REF is defined as the creation, development and maintenance of the intellectual infrastructure of subjects and disciplines, in forms such as dictionaries, scholarly editions, catalogues and contributions to major research databases.

experimental development to produce new or substantially improved materials, devices, products and processes, including design and construction. It **excludes** routine testing and routine analysis of materials, components and processes such as for the maintenance of national standards, as distinct from the development of new analytical techniques. It also **excludes** the development of teaching materials that do not embody original research.'

3 'It **includes** research that is published, disseminated or made publicly available in the form of assessable research outputs, and confidential reports (as defined at paragraph 115 in Part 3, Section 2).'

Research students

QAA recognises the diverse needs of research students and aims to encourage consistency of provision for all students, regardless of background or circumstances. The Expectation and Indicators in this Chapter are therefore intended to apply to the many different types of students undertaking UK research degrees. These include full and part-time students, UK and international students, students from all backgrounds, and those with protected characteristics. Not all Indicators are equally applicable to all students at all times, and wherever possible, the explanatory notes recognise this.

Higher education providers are responsible for ascertaining which laws and regulations apply to them. To meet the Expectation of this Chapter of the Quality Code, higher education providers may wish to consider the indicative list of reference points, guidance and examples of good practice below.

UK-wide

Equality Act 2010: www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents
Research Excellence Framework: www.ref.ac.uk

Expectation

This Chapter of the Quality Code sets out the following Expectation about research degrees which higher education providers are required to meet:

Research degrees are awarded in a research environment that provides secure academic standards for doing research and learning about research approaches, methods, procedures and protocols. This environment offers students quality of opportunities and the support they need to achieve successful academic, personal and professional outcomes from their research degrees.

Indicators of sound practice

Higher education provider arrangements

Higher education providers offering research degrees safeguard the academic standards of such programmes by putting in place arrangements that enable them to be delivered according to national and, where relevant, international expectations. Appropriate support and guidance is provided to enable research students, supervisors, examiners and other staff involved in research degrees to fulfil their responsibilities and to enable research students to complete their degrees successfully.

Indicator 1

Higher education providers that are research degree awarding bodies have regulations for research degrees that are clear and readily available to research students and staff, including examiners. Where appropriate, regulations are supplemented by similarly accessible, subject-specific guidance at the level of the faculty, school, department, research centre or research institute.

Higher education providers have in place regulations, policies and guidance (the respective status of each of these being defined at provider level) specific to research degrees. These are revised and updated regularly, to take account of developments and innovation.

Explicit regulations, policies and guidance for research degrees may include:

- requirements for recruitment to the programme
- support and guidance that helps students to ensure that, as far as possible, they have chosen a programme that is right for them
- procedures for considering claims for the accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) and/or prior certificated learning (APCL)
- supervision arrangements
- support structures at different levels, for example department, school, faculty, doctoral training centre, graduate school, research centre or research institute

- academic and procedural requirements for particular postgraduate research qualifications, including the requirements for progression, monitoring and review for each qualification and the minimum and maximum periods within which the programme may be completed
- assessment methods, requirements and procedures, including the criteria for achieving the qualification
- research integrity and ethics, including avoiding plagiarism, and intellectual property rights and responsibilities
- complaints and appeals processes.

Indicator 2

Higher education providers develop, implement and keep under review codes of practice for research degrees, which are widely applicable and help enable the higher education provider to meet the Expectation of this Chapter. The codes are readily available to all students and staff involved in research degrees, and written in clear language understood by all users.

Higher education providers use both external and internal guidance when developing their own codes of practice for research degrees. Such codes form an integral part of quality assurance mechanisms and are designed to assure the quality and maintain the academic standards of research degrees, bringing consistency to research degree provision. They help both prospective and current research students and staff to know what their responsibilities are and what they can expect from one another. Guidance at field or subject level, for example in handbooks, provides useful additional advice for research students and staff and is consistent with higher level regulations. All codes and related guidance are written clearly for, and are accessible to, those who need to use them and contain sufficient information for all intended users, including any externally located supervisors.

Higher education providers alert applicants to the relevant codes of practice at an early stage in the recruitment process. They also check that new research students are aware of the regulations and other guidance relating to their registration and degree programme.

Indicator 3

Higher education providers monitor their research degree provision against internal and external indicators and targets that reflect the context in which research degrees are being offered.

Higher education providers define what constitutes success in the broad subject areas in which research degrees are undertaken, where appropriate guided by national and international expectations. In setting targets and monitoring indicators, higher education providers take into account equality objectives, the diverse modes of study and types of their research degrees and, where appropriate, professional practitioner and PSRB requirements.

Higher education providers use statistical information interpreted by those with in-depth knowledge of the context and environment. Formal opportunities are provided for relevant committees and groups to consider statistical and other information relating to research degrees and to act upon it. Higher education providers include research students in these processes.

Factors to be considered when collecting evidence to evaluate the success of postgraduate research degrees (including as part of an annual monitoring process) may include:

- submission and completion times and rates, with account taken of any variations (for example relating to individual research students' circumstances, part-time programmes and the requirements of research councils, sponsors or other relevant bodies)
- pass, referral and fail rates
- withdrawal rates
- the number of appeals and complaints, the reasons for them, and how many are upheld
- analysis of comments from examiners
- recruitment profiles
- feedback from research students (as individuals and collectively), employers, sponsors and other external funders
- information on subsequent employment destinations and career paths of research students who have achieved the qualification.

The research environment

In each research environment a range of factors appropriate to the subject, research students and research degrees involved can be used to demonstrate its quality. National and international reference points provide subject-specific benchmarks appropriate to individual disciplines, which may also be influenced by professional requirements. In order to bring about continous enhancement it is important that higher education providers consider how they develop their research environment.

Indicator 4

Higher education providers accept research students only into an environment that provides support for doing and learning about research, and where excellent research, recognised by the relevant subject community, is occurring.

The research environment and infrastructure, which may be located in or among more than one higher education provider, or across higher education and a work setting (for example in industry), provides a suitable context for the conduct of the kind of research in question and is capable of supporting the range of research students being recruited. The environment allows for research students' changing needs and requirements as the programme develops, including providing an adequate amount of academic and, if relevant, work or practice-based supervision of an appropriate

quality. The environment is enabling and instructional, and is conceived of as a place of learning as well as of research productivity.

Factors that can be used to indicate excellence in interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary or single-disciplinary research may include:

- demonstrable research achievement as recognised either through peer assessment as internationally excellent or above, or consistently recognised by the award of grants in open competition-with, in both cases, outputs such as journal publications, books and work produced in other media, including engineering, performing arts, sculpture, fine art and design, and other professional practice-based and clinical contexts
- sufficient numbers of research-active staff, including postdoctoral researchers and research students (either located at the provider or included in collaborative or networked arrangements)
- knowledge exchange and impacts (including knowledge transfer partnerships), with an emphasis on the practical impact of research outcomes and demonstrable ability to attract external funding.

An environment suitable for doing and learning about research and for encouraging research achievement, whether directly as a provider or through collaborative arrangements, enables research students to make judgements requiring creativity and critical independent thought while accepting that uncertainty is a feature of the conduct of research programmes. Such an environment enables students to grapple with challenges that develop intellectual maturity and encourage a high level of reflection on the student's own learning about research as well as on research outcomes. Research students are encouraged to contribute actively to their research environment, whether in a research team where their own research forms part of a larger research programme, or working independently on a self-contained project.

In establishing an environment conducive to research students acquiring the range of research and personal skills that are likely to be needed by early career researchers, higher education providers may consider the Vitae Researcher Development Statement[12] (see Appendix 3), which is endorsed by QAA. Higher education providers supply explicit information about the progress research students make with their research concerning timely submission and successful completion periods in ways that are clear and readily accessible to research students and supervisors. This may vary depending on sponsors where relevant, by the mode of study of the student (for example, full-time or part-time) and according to the needs of subjects and individual students.

An appropriate environment in which to do and learn about research may include:

- exposure to researchers working at the highest level in the student's chosen field and in cognate and related disciplines
- opportunities and encouragement to work and exchange ideas with people and organisations using research outcomes for their own purposes and with colleagues in the wider research environment

[12] www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/275981/Researcher-Development-Statement-RDS.html

- access to academic and other colleagues able to give advice and support
- adequate learning and research tools, including access to IT equipment, library and electronic publications
- opportunities for research students to develop peer support networks where issues or problems can be discussed informally (this could include access to social space provided for the purpose)
- supervision (see also the section on Supervision) that encourages the development and successful pursuit of a programme of research
- guidance on the ethical pursuit of research and the avoidance of research misconduct, including plagiarism and breaches of intellectual property rights
- support in developing research-related skills, and access to a range of development opportunities that contribute to the student's ability to complete the programme successfully (including, where appropriate, understanding issues of funding and its commercial exploitation)
- access to and support for a range of development opportunities that contribute to the research student's ability to develop personal and, where pertinent, employment-related skills
- availability of relevant advice on career development.

An environment supportive of research achievement may include:

- a collegial community of academic staff and postgraduates conducting excellent research in cognate areas
- supervisors with the necessary skills and knowledge to support research students in working towards the successful completion of their research programmes
- access to the facilities and equipment necessary to enable research students, in all modes of study, to complete their research programmes successfully
- access to welfare and support facilities that recognise the distinctive nature of research degree study
- the opportunity for research students to raise complaints or appeal
- mechanisms for addressing research students' feedback both as individuals and collectively
- sufficient implementation and monitoring mechanisms to ensure that where a project is undertaken in collaboration with another organisation, the standards of both organisations are maintained.

Collaborative arrangements for research degrees adhere to the guidance set out in *Chapter B10: Management of collaborative arrangements*[13] of the Quality Code. Higher education providers put in place clear contractual arrangements between partners and with individual research students where appropriate. The agreements reflect the entitlements and responsibilities associated with different forms of collaboration, including:

[13] www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/quality-code-B10.aspx

- determining whether the qualification will be awarded jointly or by multiple research degree awarding bodies and addressing the implications, especially for the research student
- assuring that all partners' responsibilities and requirements are specified and met
- ensuring any contracts and collaborative agreements are relevant and fit for purpose (depending on whether they relate to individuals or larger groups of research students, and whether they involve industrial or commercial partners or other academic organisations, either in the UK, other European countries, or elsewhere internationally).

Higher education providers are responsible for ascertaining which laws and regulations apply to them. To meet the Expectation of this Chapter of the Quality Code, higher education providers may wish to consider the indicative list of reference points, guidance and examples of good practice below.

UK-wide

Vitae Research Development Statement and Research Development Framework:
www.vitae.ac.uk/rds
www.vitae.ac.uk/rdf

England and Wales

QAA *Supplemenary notes: Taught and research degree awarding powers (England and Wales) January 2012:*
www.qaa.ac.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/Supplementary-notes-DAP.pdf.

Selection, admission and induction of students

The Indicators below, and the accompanying explanatory notes, highlight the importance of clear admissions and induction procedures and requirements, and the need for fair and consistently applied admissions policies. Material relevant to this section can also be found in *Chapter B2: Admissions*[14] of the Quality Code.

Indicator 5

Higher education providers' admissions procedures for research degrees are clear, consistently applied and demonstrate equality of opportunity.

Higher education providers adopt fair procedures and make available accurate information on admissions processes for research degrees to applicants and staff involved in a widely accessible format (see also Part C: Information about higher education provision[15] of the Quality Code).

Higher education providers ensure that students have the information to make sure they are on a programme that is right for them.

[14] www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/quality-code-B2.aspx
[15] www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/quality-code/Pages/Quality-Code-Part-C.aspx

Through the use of timely and comprehensive development opportunities, higher education providers also ensure that staff responsible for admissions are aware of, and understand, legal requirements relating to the processes and the need to conform to such legislation.

As part of the admissions processes for research degrees, higher education providers put in place monitoring arrangements for equal opportunities requirements to satisfy themselves that:

- the programmes comply with appropriate legislation and with internal and external guidance
- an effective support infrastructure is in place for all research students, taking account of mode of study, subject needs and individual circumstances
- applicants are made aware of opportunities to apply for additional or special funding and how to apply for such funds.

Indicator 6

Only appropriately qualified and prepared applicants are admitted to research degree programmes. Admissions decisions involve at least two members of the higher education provider's staff who have received training and guidance for the selection and admission of research degree students. The decision-making process enables the higher education provider to assure itself that balanced and independent admissions decisions have been made in accordance with its admissions policy.

For doctoral research, applicants are expected to have at least one of the following:

- an undergraduate degree, usually with class 2:1 or equivalent in a relevant subject
- a relevant master's qualification or equivalent evidence of prior professional practice or learning that meets the higher education provider's criteria and guidelines for the APEL and/or APCL (including, for example, the required amount of prior publications or other output specified for applicants for the award of PhD by published work).

Higher education providers ensure guidance about admissions is accessible to both recruiters and applicants and provide training to enable those involved in admissions decision-making to fulfil their role effectively and efficiently.

Admissions staff consider, if relevant, how interviews with applicants might be used as part of the admissions process (including arrangements for assessing the suitability of those based overseas and working at a distance).

In addition to familiarising applicants and selectors with the provider's admissions policies, guidance covers the use of references and other information used to assess the suitability of an applicant to undertake postgraduate research.

Higher education providers put in place suitable criteria for assessing the applicant's qualifications and preparedness, including considering evidence submitted in support of any requests made for the accreditation of prior learning gained through professional practice or other appropriate work experience or study.

Higher education providers take account of the applicant's motivation and potential to complete the programme. The latter may be affected by his or her financial circumstances, and for this reason higher education providers give clear guidance to applicants at the earliest opportunity about their financial responsibilities and the consequences of being unable to meet their commitments.

Higher education providers specify the level of English language competence appropriate for entry to the degree. A process is consistently applied to determine whether or not applicants meet this level of competence. Higher education providers provide support for applicants that have demonstrated their academic abilities but are admitted to research degrees on the condition that their English must be improved. Applicants may expect support in the form of timely opportunities to improve their language skills to a level consistent with producing a thesis (or equivalent) that meets the requirements of the higher education provider in both grammar and style, and that enables them to defend their thesis sufficiently well during the oral examination.

For quality assurance purposes and to help selectors, higher education providers supply clear guidance about the balance of responsibilities between staff in local units and those working in central postgraduate administration.

Indicator *7*

Higher education providers define and communicate clearly the responsibilities and entitlements of students undertaking research degree programmes.

Higher education providers' offers to successful applicants for research degrees are communicated formally, for example in a letter (hard copy or electronic) that is specific to the individual applicant. This constitutes a contract between the applicant and the provider. The terms of the letter are binding on the higher education provider and, upon acceptance, on the applicant. Where responsibilities for induction and related matters are shared, for example between more than one department, school, faculty, research centre/institute, or between a graduate school, doctoral training centre and/or any of the above organisational units, the role of each is articulated clearly at the earliest opportunity.

The offer letter and enclosures may refer to:

- the expected total fees, including extra charges (such as 'bench' fees) which will be levied, and any other expenditure on practical items relevant to the individual applicant
- the expected period of study for which the applicant will be enrolled
- the requirements placed by the higher education provider on the applicant (for example, engaging in training on research methods and other relevant topics, progress reports, contact with supervisors)
- arrangements for enrolment and registration
- how to find the relevant regulations, student handbook, sources of funding (including additional and special funding, eligibility and how to apply for such funds), and other relevant information for a research degree
- the responsibilities of the applicant for his or her academic studies and candidacy for a research degree

- the requirements and conditions of any sponsor (if known)
- opportunities to undertake teaching or other duties and any conditions associated with these, including training requirements of the higher education provider (to be confirmed at the beginning of the programme unless already part of the funding arrangements)
- practical information, for example concerning accommodation, finances or travel.

Higher education providers' policies, practices and requirements with respect to intellectual property rights (including arrangements, where relevant, with external commercial or industrial organisations with their own intellectual property rights arrangements) are made clear to applicants and to any relevant third party (see also Part C: Information about higher education provision[16] of the Quality Code).

Other information is provided when an applicant has accepted an offer, for example as part of the induction process, and may include handbooks, details of health and safety procedures, regulations concerning plagiarism and good practice in research, guidance on research ethics, and how a higher education provider views personal conduct and academic performance.

Higher education providers clearly inform research students of their responsibilities at the beginning of their programme.

Research students' responsibilities may include:

- their own personal and professional development, including, where possible, recognising when they need help and seeking it in a timely manner
- maintaining regular contact with supervisors (joint responsibility with supervisors)
- preparing adequately for meetings with supervisors
- setting and keeping to timetables and deadlines, including planning and submitting work as and when required and generally maintaining satisfactory progress with the programme of research
- maintaining research records in such a way that they can be accessed and understood by anyone with a legitimate need to see them
- raising awareness of any specific needs or circumstances likely to affect their work
- attending any development opportunities (research-related or other) that have been identified when agreeing their development needs with their supervisors (see explanation with Indicator 9 below)
- being familiar with the regulations and policies that affect them, including those relating to their award, health and safety, intellectual property, electronic repositories, and ethical research (see also Indicator 4 and the bullet points under Indicator 8).

[16] www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/quality-code/Pages/Quality-Code-Part-C.aspx

Indicator 8

Research students are provided with sufficient information to enable them to begin their studies with an understanding of the environment in which they will be working.

Higher education providers ensure that the timing and content of induction programmes is appropriate and relevant to the diverse needs of specific groups of research students (including part-time and newly arriving international students, and those with professional commitments). Induction is delivered at the most suitable level (provider/faculty/school/department/research centre/research institute, or a combination).

New research students are provided with details about where they can find essential information. Higher education providers put in place arrangements for ongoing support for research students.

Information produced for incoming research students includes details about supervision arrangements, and evaluation, monitoring and review procedures. During the induction process, research students are provided with details of opportunities that exist for meeting other research students and staff, and for developing scholarly competence and independent thought.

Each student is provided with an early opportunity to meet his/her supervisor to agree on plans for the programme.

The plans that the research student and supervisor agree for the programme include the following:

- the initial objectives of the research, taking account of the sponsor's requirements where appropriate
- the development and general educational needs of the research student
- the means by which the research student and supervisor (or supervisors - see Indicator 10) will communicate and how they will arrange regular meetings
- the means of monitoring progress in the research and training aspects of the programme.

Higher education providers are responsible for ascertaining which laws and regulations apply to them. To meet the Expectation of this Chapter of the Quality Code, higher education providers may wish to consider the indicative list of reference points, guidance and examples of good practice below.

UK-wide

Equality Act 2010: www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents.

QAA (2012) *International students studying in the UK - Guidance for UK higher education providers*: www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/International-students-studying-in-the-UK.aspx.

Vitae Research Development Statement and Research Development Framework:
www.vitae.ac.uk/rds
www.vitae.ac.uk/rdf

Supervision

The research student-supervisor relationship is of paramount importance in all research degrees. Higher education providers therefore establish systematic and clear supervision arrangements. These include providing research students with:

- opportunities for access to regular and appropriate supervisory support
- encouragement to interact with other researchers
- advice from one or more independent sources, internal or external
- arrangements that protect the research student in the event of the loss of a supervisor.

The above four points are covered in more detail by the following Indicators. They provide a framework for the minimum standards required in research student supervision.

Indicator 9

Higher education providers appoint supervisors with the appropriate skills and subject knowledge to support and encourage research students, and to monitor their progress effectively.

To ensure that all supervisors possess the expertise required for their role, higher education providers use criteria for eligibility in appointing supervisors, whose performance in the role is kept under review. Supervisors are expected to engage in development opportunities, to equip them to supervise research students, and to meet requirements for continuing professional development. Supervisor training and development opportunities are relevant to research education, providing advice on how to supervise research students effectively in different circumstances, and are given similar status to programmes on teaching and learning in higher education for new academic staff. In supporting supervisors to enhance their knowledge and skills, higher education providers define and enable sharing of good practice and encourage strategies such as mentoring relationships, for example for new supervisors.

To ensure consistency of supervision, supervisors working in industry or professional practice are made aware of and enabled to fulfil the higher education provider's expectations of the supervisor role and are offered opportunities to engage in developmental activities.

Indicator 10

Each research student has a supervisory team containing a main supervisor who is the clearly identified point of contact.

Supervision arrangements vary depending on the structure for research student support that the higher education provider adopts, and on any guidance provided by the funding body where relevant. New research students are made aware when they can expect their supervisors to be appointed.

Involvement with a supervisory team provides valuable development opportunities for staff, giving them a grounding in the skills required to become an effective research supervisor. In addition to the main supervisor, the supervisory team may include:

- other supervisors and research staff in the subject
- a departmental adviser to postgraduate students
- a faculty postgraduate tutor
- other individuals in similar roles.

Breadth of experience and knowledge across the supervisory team ensures that the student always has access to someone with experience of supporting research students through to successful completion of their programme.

In all cases, each research student has an identified single point of contact who is the main supervisor. It is made clear to the research student who the alternative contact is if the main supervisor is not available. This may either be the second supervisor or an additional designated member of academic staff able to provide advice and support. To avoid misunderstandings, the names, contact details and responsibilities of the main and other supervisors are provided to research students at registration and readily available throughout their programme.

Higher education providers ensure that students are easily able to contact their supervisors for advice and guidance throughout their programme, irrespective of their geographical location. Reasonable accessibility of supervisors is given priority and providers assure themselves that research students and supervisors are aware of the importance of this, and have a shared understanding of what is reasonable.

Between them, the supervisors and, where relevant, other members of the supervisory team, ensure that research students receive sufficient support and guidance to facilitate their success.

At least one member of a student's supervisory team is currently engaged in excellent research in the relevant discipline(s), ensuring that the direction and monitoring of the student's progress is informed by up to date subject knowledge and research developments.

If and when a main supervisor is not able to continue supervising the research student, another appropriate supervisor is appointed to assume the role.

Higher education providers take a view on how long a main supervisor may be absent before a permanent replacement is appointed, bearing in mind the importance of providing breadth and continuity of supervision for the research student in determining this period. In some circumstances, another supervisor is asked to assume the role of main supervisor while a replacement main supervisor is found.

If a research student-supervisor relationship is not working well, alternative independent sources of advice are made available to the research student. By mutual agreement between the research student and the higher education provider, and where permitted by the terms of any sponsorship agreement, supervisory responsibilities can be changed, at the request of either the research student or a supervisor.

Indicator 11

Higher education providers ensure that the responsibilities of research student supervisors are readily available and clearly communicated to supervisors and students.

Supervisors and research students are made fully aware of the extent of one another's responsibilities, to enable both to understand the supervisors' contribution to supporting the research student and where the supervisors' responsibilities end.

Supervisors are sensitive to the diverse needs of individual research students and the associated support that may be required in different circumstances. Higher education providers ensure that supervisors are aware of the range of support available, and communicate to their research students how they can access it. Higher education providers ensure that relevant documents concerning these responsibilities are readily available to research students and supervisors in a format that is easily accessible to the research student.

Higher education providers develop their own staff guidance on the minimum frequency of contact advisable between research students and supervisors, as well as details of procedures for dealing with extensions and suspensions of study. Including this information in the regulations and guidance (see Indicator 2) may be helpful to research students and supervisors.

Arrangements between the research student and supervisor may be kept flexible, as long as both are satisfied that adequate support is being provided for the research student and that there are sufficient opportunities for formally monitoring progress. As well as providing opportunities for formal interaction, higher education providers expect research students and supervisors to meet informally, and frequently enough to address the research student's need for general guidance.

Research students and supervisors are jointly responsible for ensuring that regular and frequent contact is maintained. Provision is made for the research student, as well as the supervisor, to take the initiative when necessary. The nature and frequency of contact between research student and supervisor varies depending on the duration of the programme, the way the research is being conducted, and the amount of support needed by the research student.

Taking account of these considerations, the following are agreed by and clear to both research student and supervisor from the start of the programme:

- the minimum frequency of scheduled meetings between research student and supervisor, or supervisory team, and the purpose of such meetings
- guidance on the nature and style of the research student-supervisor interaction, including discussions about academic and personal progress.

The responsibilities of supervisors may be set out in guidance issued by the institution or by any sponsor(s). They may include:

- introducing the research student to the department (or equivalent), its facilities and procedures, and to other research students and relevant staff
- providing satisfactory and accurate guidance and advice

- monitoring the progress of the research student's research programme
- establishing and maintaining regular contact with the research student (guided by the higher education provider's stated regulations and guidance)
- being accessible to the research student to give advice (by whatever means is most suitable, given the research student's location and mode of study)
- contributing to the assessment of the research student's development needs
- providing timely, constructive and effective feedback on the research student's work and overall progress within the programme
- ensuring that the research student is aware of the need to exercise probity and conduct his or her research according to ethical principles, including intellectual property rights, and of the implications of research misconduct
- ensuring that the research student is aware of sources of advice, including careers guidance
- helping research students understand health and safety responsibilities
- providing effective pastoral support and/or referring the research student to other sources of such support, including student advisers, graduate school staff and others within the research student's academic community
- helping the research student to interact with others working in the field of research, for example encouraging the research student to attend relevant conferences and supporting him/her in seeking funding for such events
- where appropriate, giving encouragement and guidance to the research student on the submission of conference papers and articles to refereed journals
- maintaining the necessary supervisory expertise, including the appropriate skills, to perform all of the role satisfactorily, supported by relevant continuing professional development opportunities.

Indicator 12

Higher education providers ensure that individual supervisors have sufficient time to carry out their responsibilities effectively.

In appointing supervisors, managers need to be aware of and guided by the overall workload of the individual, including teaching, research, administration and other responsibilities; for example, external examining duties and other professional commitments, such as consultancy or clinical responsibilities. The role of supervisors is critical in maintaining quality and academic standards when supporting research students' research, and higher education providers therefore find ways of showing their support for and rewarding this valuable contribution to the research environment.

Higher education providers ensure that supervisors have sufficient time for adequate contact with each research student to fulfil the responsibilities listed under Indicator 11. Supervisors and research students agree between themselves the level of interaction required and what constitutes sufficient contact (which may vary year by year to reflect the research student's changing needs), in terms of both the quality and the quantity of the time allocated.

When a research student needs advice or guidance, supervisors respond within a reasonable timescale.

Higher education providers are responsible for ascertaining which laws and regulations apply to them. To meet the Expectation of this Chapter of the Quality Code, higher education providers may wish to consider the indicative list of reference points, guidance and examples of good practice below.

UK-wide

Vitae Research Development Statement and Research Development Framework:
www.vitae.ac.uk/rds
www.vitae.ac.uk/rdf

Progress and review arrangements

Regular and structured interaction is necessary between research students and supervisors to enable research students to progress satisfactorily. Higher education providers alert research students and supervisors to the requirements of the progress and review process, including knowledge of their respective responsibilities.

Indicator 13 covers all types of review of research student progress, including meetings between the research student and the supervisors, and meetings of other individuals, such as members of an annual review panel. There are two distinct types of review: meetings that deal with formal review of the research student's progress and forward planning, and informal meetings where the research student and members of the supervisory team meet to discuss general matters relating to the student's research.

Indicator 13

Higher education providers put in place clearly defined mechanisms for monitoring and supporting research student progress, including formal and explicit reviews of progress at different stages. Research students, supervisors and other relevant staff are made aware of progress monitoring mechanisms, including the importance of keeping appropriate records of the outcomes of meetings and related activities.

The main purpose of the monitoring process is to provide overall support for the research student to maximise his or her likelihood of completing the research programme successfully within an appropriate timescale. The purpose and frequency of monitoring arrangements are made clear from the outset, so that both the research student and the supervisor can plan adequately for them, prepare relevant documents, and consult other individuals as appropriate.

The monitoring process also enables staff to ascertain when a research student's progress is not satisfactory. Support is given to help the research student make improvements.

Higher education providers put in place processes for reviewing research students' progress, involving individuals independent of the supervisors and the research student. Such processes operate less regularly than meetings between research student and supervisor and may involve, for example, an annual review by a panel or other

specified body such as a research degrees committee. A significant progress review is undertaken at specific points in a research student's programme, for example when completing probationary periods of training or transferring from a research master's to a doctoral degree. The student is present at this review. In professional or practice-based doctorates, there may be a requirement for research students to pass structured elements of a programme before progressing. Formal evaluation of progress in these circumstances may involve summative assessment.

The target dates of expected review stages throughout the programme, such as those referred to above, are agreed by and clear to both research student and supervisors.

Higher education providers make clear to research students and supervisors from the beginning of the programme:

- the implications of the possible outcomes of formal review meetings or assessments
- the criteria to be used for making decisions about the extension, suspension or termination of a research student's registration
- the circumstances in which research student appeal mechanisms may be used and how to use them

Regulations specify the minimum and maximum periods within which the research student can complete the research programme. Bearing these in mind, decisions about transferring a student's registration to a doctoral qualification, or confirming such a registration, take place when there is sufficient evidence to assess the student's performance. The research student usually provides, as a minimum, a written submission which is considered by a panel independent of the research student and the supervisory team and which includes the research student's main supervisor (as an observer). Research students can request the opportunity to meet a review panel without the supervisors being present.

Guidance in this area is made easily accessible to all concerned. It may take the form of advice about the operation of the panel and the kind of records that need to be kept in relation to different types of meeting and review. For example, the information that is recorded after an informal meeting that takes place regularly between the research student and his or her supervisor is likely to be different from and less detailed than the formal record of a meeting to consider an application to transfer to a doctoral degree or a meeting of an annual review panel. It may be considered important for research students to keep the record of regular 'routine' meetings with supervisors, who also keep copies of records of supervisory meetings.

Development of research and other skills

The importance of acquiring research and other skills during research degree programmes is recognised by research students, academic staff, sponsoring organisations, employers and doctoral graduates. These skills improve the research student's ability to complete the research programme successfully. The development and application of such skills is a significant element in the research graduate's capability for sustaining learning throughout his or her career, whether in an academic

role or in other employment. Research students are encouraged to take ownership and responsibility for their own learning, during and after their programme of study, and to recognise the value of developing transferable skills.

Material relevant to this section will also be found in *Chapter B4: Student support, learning resources and careers education, information, advice and guidance*[17] of the Quality Code.

Indicator 14

Research students have appropriate opportunities for developing research, personal and professional skills. Each research student's development needs are identified and agreed jointly by the student and appropriate staff at the start of the degree; these are regularly reviewed and updated as appropriate.

Research students may need support to develop the subject-specific, research, communication and other skills they require to become effective researchers, to enhance their employability and to assist their career progress after completion of their degree. These skills may to varying extents be present on commencement and require further development, be explicitly taught, or be developed during the research programme.

Opportunities for developing personal and professional skills take account of the differing needs of individual research students arising from the diversity both of their prior experience and of the environments in which they may later draw upon these skills. A range of mechanisms is used to support learning, and they are sufficiently flexible to address those individual needs. The emphasis in formal training is on quality, relevance and timeliness.

Opportunities for skills development are integrated in research degrees. Depending on the nature of the subject and the needs of the research student, personal and professional development opportunities for research students are provided with the aim being to maximise the effectiveness of training in developing skills, both research and generic.

In deciding which elements of research and skills development to make mandatory, higher education providers take into account advice from research councils and other sources. To ensure research students' needs are being met, providers regularly review the training in research and generic skills provided for their research students.

Opportunities for skills development are made available either by the higher education provider offering the research student's research programme or by other providers, for example through regional or other collaboration.

Higher education providers draw on their experience of structured training and education to establish personal and professional development opportunities for the benefit of research students. The extent to which research students are required to take advantage of these opportunities is often negotiated through the supervision process, taking account of subject and individual needs.

[17] www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/quality-code/Pages/Quality-Code-Part-C.aspx

Supporting the learning and teaching of others, and if appropriate assessing student work, provides research students with an opportunity to develop a range of personal skills. It can also reinforce research students' own knowledge of their subject. Higher education providers may offer research students non-compulsory teaching opportunities, in some circumstances and subjects; these may be limited and not necessarily available to all research students. Where research students have teaching roles, they receive appropriate training, support and mentoring, for their own benefit and to safeguard the experience of the students they are teaching. Where possible higher education providers enable postgraduates to be part of a larger teaching team so that they can benefit from the support and mentoring provided by experienced teachers. They ensure that teaching duties are not so intensive or time-consuming as to affect the research student's ability to complete on time.

Students are encouraged to reflect on their learning, supported by frameworks developed by providers for recording personal development.

Higher education providers ensure that research students who may be unfamiliar with keeping records of their progress and development receive additional guidance and support. Higher education providers may develop ways of formally recognising the acquisition of transferable skills in parallel with, or as part of, the academic assessment of the research student's progress.

Higher education providers are responsible for ascertaining which laws and regulations apply to them. To meet the Expectation of this Chapter of the Quality Code, higher education providers may wish to consider the indicative list of reference points, guidance and examples of good practice below.

UK-wide

Vitae Research Development Statement and Research Development Framework:
www.vitae.ac.uk/rds
www.vitae.ac.uk/rdf

Evaluation mechanisms

Collecting and acting upon evaluation from research students, staff, examiners, and others involved in research programmes is an important part of the quality assurance process at all levels (higher education provider/faculty/school/department/research centre/research institute). Wherever possible and relevant, providers integrate the results of external surveys with internal evaluation mechanisms.

Indicator 15

Higher education providers put in place mechanisms to collect, review and respond as appropriate to evaluations from those concerned with research degrees, including individual research students and groups of research students or their representatives. Evaluations are considered openly and constructively and the results are communicated appropriately.

Higher education providers establish and operate constructive evaluation procedures that are as representative as possible of the views of all those involved. These include mechanisms for seeking, analysing and acting upon feedback from the following groups:

- current research students and recent research degree graduates
- supervisors, review panels and internal examiners
- research administrators
- external parties, including external examiners, sponsors, collaborating organisations, employers and, where possible, alumni.

(See also list of suggested evaluation factors in bullet points accompanying Indicator 3).

Individual evaluation mechanisms enable students, if they wish, to provide confidential views that are not made known to their supervisors unless the research student's permission is given.

Higher education providers use the evaluations in an appropriate format in their quality assurance processes, as part of the regular review of academic standards and quality. The feedback and review cycle occurs at least annually. Information about action taken in response to evaluations is clear and made easily and promptly available to those involved (see also *Chapter B5: Student engagement*[18] of the Quality Code).

Higher education providers are responsible for ascertaining which laws and regulations apply to them. To meet the Expectation of this Chapter of the Quality Code, higher education providers may wish to consider the indicative list of reference points, guidance and examples of good practice below.

UK-wide

Higher Education Academy Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES): www.heacademy.ac.uk/PRES.

Assessment

Assessment processes for research qualifications reflect the distinctive nature of research degrees and include an oral examination. The following three Indicators and explanations address the most important elements of assessment for research students and qualifications.

Material relevant to this section may also be found in *Chapter A6: Assessment of achievement of learning outcomes*[19] and *Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning*[20] of the Quality Code.

Indicator 16

Higher education providers that are research degree awarding bodies use criteria for assessing research degrees that enable them to define their academic standards and the achievements of their graduates. The criteria used to assess research degrees are clear and readily available to research students, staff and examiners.

[18] www.qaa.ac.uk/Newsroom/Consultations/Pages/student-engagement.aspx
[19] www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/quality-code-a6.aspx
[20] www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/quality-code-b6.aspx

In setting criteria for assessing different types of research degrees, higher education providers that are research degree awarding bodies refer to the qualification descriptors for doctoral and research master's degrees in the frameworks for higher education qualifications (or their equivalent). Higher education providers that are research degree awarding bodies use the qualification nomenclature in these documents, including the guidance on the use of titles for research degrees of different kinds. Assessment criteria may be modified to reflect differences in subjects such as the performing or visual arts and those of professional and practice-based doctorates and doctorates by published work.

Higher education providers that are research degree awarding bodies safeguard the academic integrity and consistency of such programmes and awards internally and externally, by applying assessment criteria for postgraduate research degrees, taking account of the standards summarised in the UK qualification descriptors for doctoral degrees and master's degrees by research. They make assessment criteria available to research students to give them the insight they need into what is expected of them. Criteria enable research students to show the full extent of their abilities and achievements at the level of the qualification for which they are aiming. They also offer practical advice for research students, for example on the required presentation of work, what is meant by originality, and about best academic practice.

When making an award at a different level from the qualification for which the student has initially been assessed (for example giving a master's award to a PhD candidate), higher education providers that are research degree awarding bodies use assessment criteria that enable examiners to recognise the research student's positive achievement.

Indicator 17

Research degree final assessment procedures are clear and are operated rigorously, fairly and consistently. They include input from an external examiner and are carried out to a reasonable timescale. Assessment procedures are communicated clearly to research students, supervisors and examiners.

Although there is some variation between higher education providers and between different types of research degree, common features of research degree assessment procedures in the UK system are as follows.

- The candidate is examined on the basis of an appropriate body of work and an oral examination (viva voce or viva).
- As a minimum, two appropriately qualified examiners are appointed for the purpose, at least one of whom is external to the higher education provider and the research degree awarding body. Where more than two examiners are appointed, the majority are generally from outside the higher education provider and the research degree awarding body.
- None of the candidate's supervisors are appointed as an examiner.
- It is exceptional to appoint as internal or external examiner researchers who have had substantial co-authoring or collaborative involvement in the candidate's work or whose own work is the focus of the research project.

- Examiners submit separate, independent written reports before the viva and a joint report after it.

The following are given careful consideration:

- the criteria to be used in appointing examiners
- the preparatory period prior to the viva
- how the viva will be conducted
- how and when the result will be communicated to the candidate
- how to handle cases where the examiners cannot reach a consensus
- the criteria to be used for selecting external examiners when they have had previous affiliations with the awarding body or the provider.

More details on some of these are given below.

The criteria used in appointing examiners determine how many examiners are to be appointed and other details. Higher education providers that are research degree awarding bodies may appoint additional external examiners where the research student is also a member of staff, or in cases where the thesis is highly interdisciplinary. There is a methodology for establishing that the examiners have relevant qualifications and experience and a clear understanding of the task, and for determining in what circumstances and with what support an inexperienced examiner might be appointed. The higher education provider also decides what guidance is to be given to the examiners.

The preparatory period prior to the viva includes providing the examiners with the information they need and ensuring that they are able to identify the areas to be explored at the viva. Thought is given to the procedures for handling such reports, including to whom they should be submitted and when.

In planning how the viva will be conducted, higher education providers satisfy themselves that the process meets agreed criteria for fairness and consistency. Higher education providers that are research degree awarding bodies may appoint an independent, non-examining chair, who may not contribute to the assessment judgement. Such an appointment, and clear guidance on the extent of the chair's role and responsibilities, including details about the circumstances in which the chair will be used, encourages consistency between different vivas and provides an additional viewpoint if the conduct of the viva should become the subject of a research student appeal. Where the appointment of an independent chair is not feasible, higher education providers that are research degree awarding bodies find alternative ways of assuring fairness and consistency, acceptable to the candidate, that enable him or her to know the viva is being conducted in an appropriate manner. Higher education providers that are research degree awarding bodies also take a view on whether the student's supervisor may be present with the research student's agreement, and if so, on what basis, making it clear that s/he may not contribute to the academic judgement; whether other people may be present (for example, current research students); and whether it would be helpful to ask for an account of how the viva was conducted.

How and when the result will be communicated to the candidate is affected by the result itself, among other factors. It involves giving thought to:

- the range of assessment outcomes open to the examiners, including referral, or awarding a qualification different from the one for which the research student has been examined
- the nature and source of guidance to be given if a research student is asked to revise and re-submit the thesis
- the various parties who need to be notified of the result (for example the research student's sponsor).

Higher education providers that are research degree awarding bodies also assure themselves that the research programme assessments carried out in its name address appropriate assessment criteria, which might be informed by this Indicator. For example, a higher education provider may decide to have a system for reading examiners' report(s) similar to that in place for reading external examiners' reports at undergraduate and taught master's levels, which would highlight any relevant comments or suggestions from examiners about the conduct of the final examination. Additionally, keeping a log to ensure that the process is being conducted promptly, on the grounds that undue delay is unfair to the candidate, may be considered.

The main official source of information on research degree assessment is the regulations of the higher education providers that are research degree awarding bodies. These are likely to be written in semi-legal language, because they may be used in formal complaints and appeals processes. The higher education provider may therefore choose to supplement regulations with a guide that provides candidates and staff with a clear understanding of the assessment process and its implications, explained from the research student's perspective. Information is given about timings and deadlines, the assessment process itself, the time taken to reach a decision, and the potential outcomes of the assessment. In particular, candidates are warned of the penalties for plagiarism, and reminded of the significance of declaring that the material being presented for examination is their own work.

As the viva is an especially challenging event in research students' careers, higher education providers offer support in preparing for it. Support may include providing written guidance and/or making arrangements for the candidate to undergo a mock viva or other similar experience.

Higher education providers also determine whether and when candidates should be given copies of the report and whether this should be the final report only, or the final report and the separate independent reports prepared before the viva. Examiners' reports can provide an important source of feedback if made accessible to candidates; where reports are made available, examiners are informed of this policy in advance.

Research student complaints and appeals

It is in the interests of research students and higher education providers to resolve problems at an early stage. To facilitate this, higher education providers ensure that research students and staff understand the difference between informal ways of resolving problems and routes they can use to make formal complaints or appeals.

It is also important to distinguish between complaints, which relate to general matters (including conduct), and appeals, which concern procedures leading to specific outcomes or decisions. Higher education providers that are research degree awarding bodies develop their own definitions of complaints and appeals, and assure themselves that staff and students are aware of the different procedures.

Material relevant to this and the following two sections may also be found in *Chapter B9: Complaints and appeals*[22] of the Quality Code.

Indicator 18

Higher education providers put in place and promote independent and formal procedures for dealing with complaints and appeals that are fair, clear to all concerned, robust, and applied consistently. The acceptable grounds for complaints and appeals are clearly defined.

Procedures for addressing complaints and appeals at various levels (awarding body/faculty/school/department/research centre/research institute) are clearly and openly publicised to research students. They apply equally to all research students, including those who are part-time, off-site, registered on collaborative programmes, or on visiting programmes. The importance of resolving any problems at an early stage is made clear to research students and staff. All concerned are made aware of the stages and processes, informal and formal, through which complaints and appeals can be made.

Higher education providers ensure that their schools and departments have accessible mechanisms that apply when research students are not able to resolve difficulties informally. To assist in resolving problems at an early stage, providers appoint an impartial person/persons with suitable experience to whom research students can take their complaints, and whose role is widely publicised.

Complaints

Higher education providers implement complaints procedures that are appropriate for use by research students. These include an indicative timetable for dealing with different types of complaint; some may need to be dealt with more quickly than others.

Higher education providers highlight to research students their responsibilities in relation to pursuing a complaint, and the need for them to discharge these. On receipt of a formal complaint, higher education providers inform research students promptly of the actions that they will take in order to investigate and resolve the issue.

Appeals

All appeals procedures are fit for purpose, impartial and well publicised to protect the rights of all those concerned. They are dealt with fairly and in a timely manner.

Higher education providers that are research degree awarding bodies define the acceptable grounds for and how to lodge an appeal. This information is communicated to all research students. An accessible explanation of the appeals process is provided, including:

[22] www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/quality-code-B9.aspx

- how decisions are taken to grant an appeal hearing
- the constitution of an appeal panel, and the relation of its members to those involved in the original assessment decision
- information for research students about presenting their case
- how records of an appeal hearing are maintained
- the mechanisms for communicating the results of an appeal hearing to interested parties.

Higher education providers are responsible for ascertaining which laws and regulations apply to them. To meet the Expectation of this Chapter of the Quality Code, higher education providers may wish to consider the indicative list of reference points, guidance and examples of good practice below.

England and Wales

Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA): www.oiahe.org.uk.

Scotland

Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman (SPSO): www.spso.org.uk.

(Currently there is no comparable arrangement in Northern Ireland, although students at the Universities of Ulster and Queen's each have access to their University's Visitor).

Appendices

Appendix 1 - The Expectation and Indicators

Expectation

This Chapter of the Quality Code sets out the following Expectation about research degrees which higher education providers are required to meet:

Research degrees are awarded in a research environment that provides secure academic standards for doing research and learning about research approaches, methods, procedures and protocols. This environment offers students quality of opportunities and the support they need to achieve successful academic, personal and professional outcomes from their research degrees.

Indicators

Indicator 1

Higher education providers that are research degree awarding bodies have regulations for research degrees that are clear and readily available to research students and staff, including examiners. Where appropriate, regulations are supplemented by similarly accessible, subject-specific guidance at the level of the faculty, school, department, research centre or research institute.

Indicator 2

Higher education providers develop, implement and keep under review codes of practice for research degrees, which are widely applicable and help enable the higher education provider meet the Expectation of this Chapter. The codes are readily available to all students and staff involved in research degrees, and written in clear language understood by all users.

Indicator 3

Higher education providers monitor their research degree provision against internal and external indicators and targets that reflect the context in which research degrees are being offered.

Indicator 4

Higher education providers accept research students only into an environment that provides support for doing and learning about research, and where excellent research, recognised by the relevant subject community, is occurring.

Indicator 5

Higher education providers' admissions procedures for research degrees are clear, consistently applied and demonstrate equality of opportunity.

Indicator 6

Only appropriately qualified and prepared applicants are admitted to research degree programmes. Admissions decisions involve at least two members of the higher education provider's staff who have received training and guidance for the selection and admission of research degree students. The decision-making process enables the higher education provider to assure itself that balanced and independent admissions decisions have been made in accordance with its admissions policy.

Indicator 7

Higher education providers define and communicate clearly the responsibilities and entitlements of students undertaking research degree programmes.

Indicator 8

Research students are provided with sufficient information to enable them to begin their studies with an understanding of the environment in which they will be working.

Indicator 9

Higher education providers appoint supervisors with the appropriate skills and subject knowledge to support and encourage research students, and to monitor their progress effectively.

Indicator 10

Each research student has a supervisory team containing a main supervisor who is the clearly identified point of contact.

Indicator 11

Higher education providers ensure that the responsibilities of research student supervisors are readily available and clearly communicated to supervisors and students.

Indicator 12

Higher education providers ensure that individual supervisors have sufficient time to carry out their responsibilities effectively.

Indicator 13

Higher education providers put in place clearly defined mechanisms for monitoring and supporting research student progress, including formal and explicit reviews of progress at different stages. Research students, supervisors and other relevant staff are made aware of progress monitoring mechanisms, including the importance of keeping appropriate records of the outcomes of meetings and related activities.

Indicator 14

Research students have appropriate opportunities for developing research, personal and professional skills. Each research student's development needs are identified and agreed jointly by the student and appropriate staff at the start of the degree; these are regularly reviewed and updated as appropriate.

Indicator 15

Higher education providers put in place mechanisms to collect, review and respond as appropriate to evaluations from those concerned with research degrees, including individual research students and groups of research students or their representatives. Evaluations are considered openly and constructively and the results are communicated appropriately.

Indicator 16

Higher education providers that are research degree awarding bodies use criteria for assessing research degrees that enable them to define their academic standards and the achievements of their graduates. The criteria used to assess research degrees are clear and readily available to research students, staff and examiners.

Indicator 17

Research degree final assessment procedures are clear and are operated rigorously, fairly and consistently. They include input from an external examiner and are carried out to a reasonable timescale. Assessment procedures are communicated clearly to research students, supervisors and examiners.

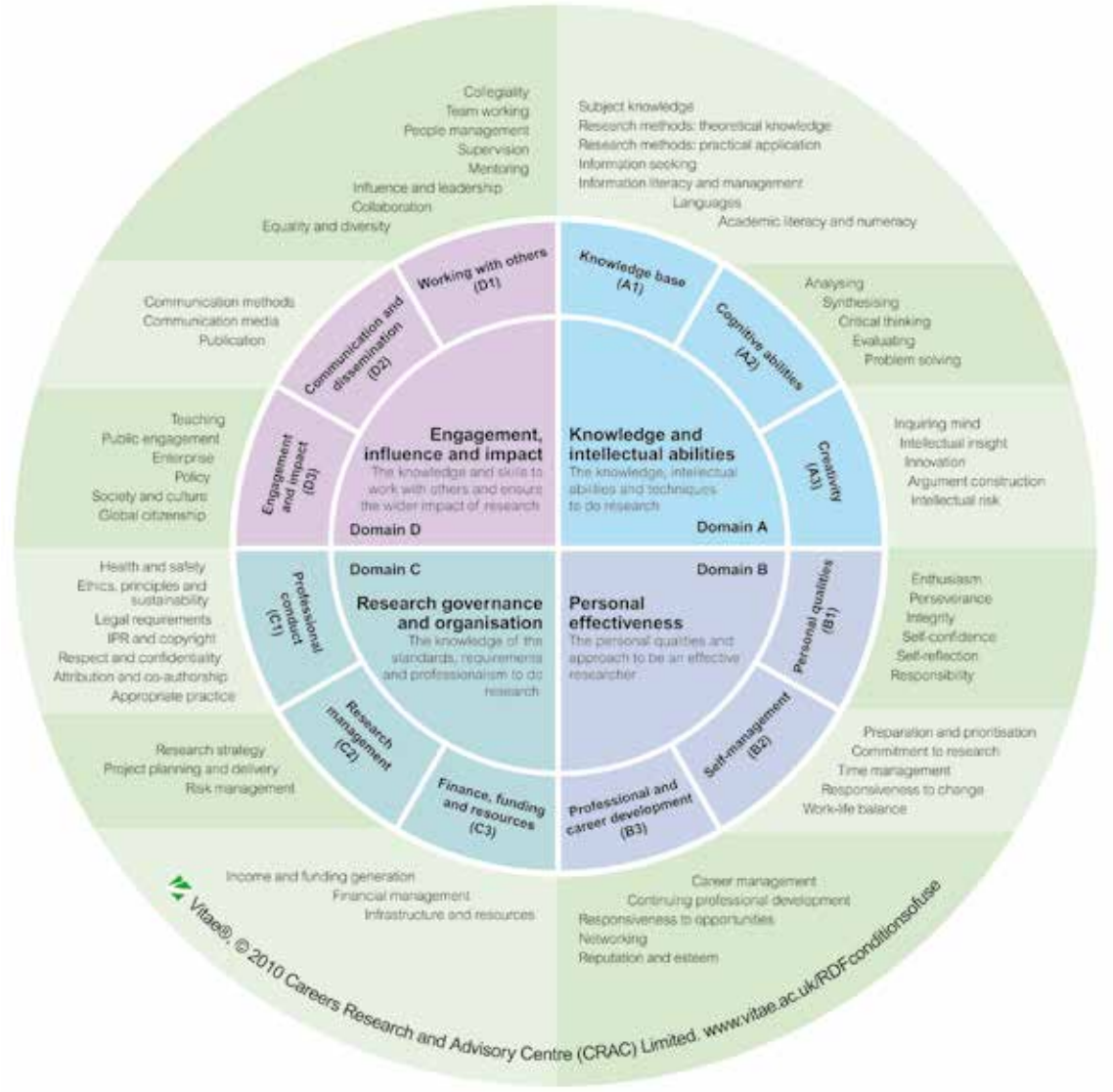
Indicator 18

Higher education providers put in place and promote independent and formal procedures for dealing with complaints and appeals that are fair, clear to all concerned, robust, and applied consistently. The acceptable grounds for complaints and appeals are clearly defined.

Appendix 2 - Members of the Advisory Group for *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Janet Bohrer	Assistant Director	QAA
Dr Iain Cameron	Head of Research Careers and Diversity	Research Councils UK
Gill Clarke	Vice-Chair	UK Council for Graduate Education (from February 2012)
	DPhil student	Oxford University
Dr Rob Daley	Researcher Development Coordinator	Heriot-Watt University
Professor Pam Denicolo	Vice-Chair	UK Council for Graduate Education (to February 2012)
	Professor: Doctoral Studies Advocate	University of Surrey
Dr Dawn Edwards	Director of Quality Assurance and Enhancement	Royal Northern College of Music
Dr Kevin Flint	Chair of Special Interest Group (SIG)/Senior Lecturer in Education	Professional Doctorates SIG/ Nottingham Trent University
Heather Gibson	Development Officer	QAA Scotland
Louisa Green	Research Degrees Manager	London School of Economics
Dr Susan Grey	Director of Research Degrees	University of Hertfordshire
Dr Peter Heard	Executive Director, Graduate School	Glyndwr University
Dr Cathy Kerfoot	Development Officer	QAA
Professor Ingrid Lunt	Professor of Educational Studies and Director of Graduate Studies, Department of Education	University of Oxford
Dr Debbie McVitty	Senior Research and Policy Officer (Higher Education)	National Union of Students (NUS)
Dante Micheaux	NUS postgraduate representative and Postgraduate Association President	University College London
Steven Quigley	Academic Registrar	Regents College
Dr Christian Yeomans	Policy Officer (Europe)	International Unit

Appendix 3 - Researcher Development Framework



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