Annex D

Framework of quality standards for research degree programmes

The purpose of this framework is to identify a set of standards and examples of good practice to ensure quality in the provision and delivery across all aspects of the research degree programme (RDP[1]).

The framework is divided into eight sections:

1. Institutional arrangements for research degree programmes
2. Research environment
3. Selection, admission, enrolment and induction of students
4. Supervisory arrangements
5. Initial review and subsequent progress
6. Development of research and other skills
7. Feedback mechanisms
8. Appeals and complaints procedures

Column one identifies the requirements for the academic provision; columns two and three show how that translates into responsibilities for supervisors, and for students. Column four gives the institutional requirements for good administrative procedures, regulations and processes.

Within each section we present a set of indicators that impact on the quality of research degree programmes. For each of these indicators we have identified possible minimum standards (1A to 8A), the achievement of which could be conditional for funding.

Mapped against the framework (in the grey boxes) are the results of the survey of current practice in institutions.

Statements and figures in square brackets [ ] are offered tentatively.

Annex A gives a glossary of the terms used in this framework.

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[1] This term is used to cover all aspects of the student experience from recruitment and induction, supervision, and skills development, through to assessment for any higher research degree.

1. Institutional arrangements for research degree programmes			
Academic standards	**Standards for supervisors**	**Standards for student/institution relations**	**Administrative process standards**
1A: The institutional code of practice for RDPs must meet, and preferably exceed, the standards in this document. **1A** 93% of institutions operate a code of practice based on the QAA code. Institution to ensure that it has adequate arrangements and resources to deliver to standards that are at least as high as those set out in this document. It should have mechanisms to ensure that all areas meet these criteria. Co-operative arrangements can be made with other units, institutions and organisations if there are any aspects for which the minimum standards are not met. Any arrangements must be formal, explicit, recorded, and monitored by the institution.	All supervisors to receive, and conform to the practices within the institutional code of practice.	All potential students to receive clear and accurate information on RDPs including the expectations and demands (financial and other) placed on the research student. Make explicit to students their legal commitment to the institutional code of practice when enrolling on an RDP. Make it explicit that the institution has a legal commitment to make provisions to students at levels which are also set out in the code of practice.	Standards to be together in an institutional code of practice covering all the points in this document and conforming to current legislation. The code to be given (and made available on the web) to every applicant, student, supervisory team, academic panel and examiner in a form that makes clear their respective responsibilities. Ensure that the provision of RDPs and related activities are accessible to all students, particularly part-time students and students with special needs.
		1B 64% monitor effectiveness of code of practice annually	**1B: Institution to monitor, review and act on the application of the standards in its code, including the various standards set out in this document.** **1C: Institutional and unit performance to be monitored [annually] on progress and attrition against agreed targets including gender and ethnic groupings:** ▪ **submission rates [80% within 4years]** ▪ **average time to submission** ▪ **completion rates [80% within 4.5years]** ▪ **level of appeals, complaints** ▪ **student feedback.**
		1C Factors feeding into institutional quality assurance mechanisms: - time taken to submit 94% - feedback from current students 97% - external examiner comments 93% - pass & fail rates 86% - feedback from past students 32%	

2. The research environment

Academic standards	Standards for supervisors	Standards for student/institution relations	Administrative process standards
Research training programmes should only be offered by units that meet defined research standards. The HEI should set these for each unit by reference to, eg: ■ RAE rating ■ level of grants and other funding ■ number of research active staff ■ papers, publications & patents ■ facilities ■ completion and pass rates. ⇐ For units which do not meet the institution's standards, research training should only be offered after co-operative arrangements have been made with a unit in which the standards are met**.** **2A: RDPs offered in units with minimum RAE rating consistent with [current QR funding levels] .**	Supervisors to have relevant experience and recent publications in student's project area. 77% specify what is a suitable environment for research training: - appropriate infrastructure & facilities 57% - suitably qualified supervisors 41% - research active/reputation of unit 27% - access to seminars/critical mass 27% - institutionally/code defined 21% - minimum RAE rating 8%	Students to have a duty to contribute to the research environment (see Section 6).	Institutions to establish unit research standards (at or above the threshold); such standards to be subject to monitoring and regular review by the institution. Co-operative links with other units, institutions and organisations formed in order to reach minimum standards must be formal, explicit, recorded and monitored by the institution. This should include demonstrating how the agreement(s) will achieve the effective operation of the required minimum standard.
Research active units should have a critical mass of research active staff/postdoctorates and research students within the unit or arrange this through explicit co-operative arrangements with other relevant units. **2B: Demonstrate, within the unit/cognate area, a way of providing effective interactions:** ■ **with a minimum [5] research active staff/postdoctorates** ■ **between a group of at least [10] students.**	**2B** Mechanisms for effective student interactions: - attendance at conferences 50% - inter-institutional interactions 45% - research training 16%		
2C: Sufficient facilities for the research project, including library and IT facilities, should be available at or above the level needed for research of a national standard.		Students to have same access as academic staff to institutional resources, facilities and equipment (e.g. library privileges, funds for inter-library loans) and sufficient to do the project.	Institution should demonstrate a commitment to RDP by providing year round access to facilities with no distinction between term time and vacations.

3. The selection, admission, enrolment and induction of students			
Academic standards	**Standards for supervisors**	**Standards for student/institution relations**	**Administrative process standards**
There must be a rigorous admissions procedure to match students with a programme of research, supervisory team and institution. This may be achieved by: ▪ requiring all students to meet a minimum academic standard ▪ conducting face to face interviews for all applicants – which could be by video conference or local agent for overseas applicants ▪ taking up a minimum number of academic references for each applicant ▪ assessing other relevant information, e.g. language proficiency. **3A: Institutional minimum level of academic entry standard [2.1 or masters or institutionally defined equivalent APL/APEL].** **3B: Selection process and admission decision to involve at least [2] experienced and research active academics, trained in admission processes.** **3B** 72% always involve more than one experienced member of staff, 23% usually - 10% always/30% usually require training - 31%always/48% usually interview - 39%always/40% usually involve more than one academic on interview panel - 78%always/13% usually follow up references	**3A** Academic capabilities of prospective students assessed by: - academic qualifications 59% - references 56% - interview 45% - project proposal 29% Non standard applications assessed by: - interview 42% - references 36% - project proposal 19% - work experience 18% - assessment of academic qualifications 12% Overseas candidates assessed by: - video/telephone interviews 31% - equivalent qualifications 31% - project proposal 27% - interview in-situ by agent 15% - language proficiency 61% (ELTS or equivalent)	Confidentiality should be maintained throughout the admissions process. The student should be informed of and agree during the admission process: ▪ broad outline of proposed research topic and length of study ▪ facilities and space to be made available to the student ▪ choice of supervisory team, nature of the supervisory arrangements and 'contract' (see Section 4) ▪ requirements on the student eg attendance, progress reports, contact, enrolment, registration ▪ expectations of student in relation to academic and social conduct and performance ▪ requirements and availability of training. Applicants to made aware of any relevant institutional funds/bursaries to support students. **3C** Information available on the web: - fees 74% - admission criteria 74% - admission procedure 72% - cost of living/accommodation 47% - all additional costs 32%	Written criteria and processes for admission of students and allocation of projects, achievement of which should be monitored. Target response timescales to be published and monitored for each stage in the admissions cycle. The person(s) responsible for making offers to be defined. Institution to seek assurance that the student has sufficient financial support to complete the RDP. **3C: Open access to all relevant material on web.** **3D: Formal offer letter should include:** ▪ **fees and charges** ▪ **period of study** ▪ **direction of study** ▪ **specific requirements** ▪ **other requirements** ▪ **direction to other relevant information and codes of practice (eg on the web)** ▪ **student's responsibilities.** **3D** Formal offer letter includes: - total fees, including bench fees, etc 80% - enrolment and registration arrangements 74% - name of supervisor 73% - normal length of study 65% - supervisory arrangements 55% - training requirements 43% - facilities to be made available 41% - outline of proposed research programme 36% - student's responsibilities 35% - research ethics, codes, IPR 31%

3. The selection, admission, enrolment and induction of students (continued)

Academic standards	Standards for supervisors	Standards for student/institution relations	Administrative process standards
Induction process to explain the academic requirements of the RDP including matters such as research codes and ethics, academic misconduct, IPR and plagiarism.	Main supervisor to be actively involved in ensuring the student receives, understands and accepts the expectations of the RDP, and of any Health and Safety requirements and relevant legislation through the induction process.	The induction process should provide students with the opportunity to meet other researchers and staff and should explain mutual expectations, including: • challenges typically faced by a research student and where guidance may be sought • facilities made available to students as well as the provision of learning support infrastructure • provision for student welfare and other support arrangements • skills training programmes (Section 5) • expectations about opportunities to broaden knowledge through seminars, conferences, forums, etc.	Institution to provide a formal induction process within the first three months to cover all the points in columns 1-3 as well as other institutional matters such as ▪ the institution and its postgraduate portfolio ▪ the institution's regulations and procedures – including on IPR ▪ Health & Safety and other relevant legislation. Institution to monitor student attendance during the induction process and provide mechanisms to accommodate cross-sessional entrants.
		3E: Student and institution to sign up to an agreement on the learning outcomes of the RDP.	**3F: Institution to provide a formal induction process with monitored attendance.**
		3E Student provided written information on: - RDP regulations & registration 83% - assessment and review procedures 82% - supervision arrangements 78% - appeals and complaints procedures 76% - facilities and learning support 72% - student welfare 72% - health and safety information 72% - skills training programmes 69% - availability of guidance 60% - opportunities of peer group support 48%	**3F** More than 50% of FT/PT students receive: - compulsory induction programme 56%/40% - voluntary induction programme 31%/30% - supervisor induction 55%/50%

4. Supervisory arrangements			
Academic standards	**Standards for supervisors**	**Standards for student/institution relations**	**Administrative process standards**
4A: Provide a supervisory team consisting of at least [2], one of whom should be designated as the 'main' supervisor with overall responsibility for the student. For interdisciplinary, collaborative or externally/industrially supervised projects, there should be a 'third party' in the supervisory team to provide the student with access to an independent view. **4A** 94% have criteria for supervisory arrangements: - 40% defined within code of practice or institutional guidelines - 13% highlighted supervisory teams **4B: At least [2] members of the 'supervisory team' should be demonstrably research active academics with relevant knowledge and skills to supervise and with defined roles.** **4B** 78% specify the experience required of supervisors **4C: At least [1] member of the supervisory team to be from a minimum [3a] RAE rated department.**	The roles of the members of the supervisory team should be clearly understood by the team and student. **4D: The 'main' supervisor to have had experience of at least [1] successful supervision within a supervisory team.** **4D** 15% specify one or more prior completions by main supervisor **4E: The 'main' supervisor should take prime responsibility for a maximum [8] students.** **4E** 69% give guidance on supervisor workloads 25% specified 3-10 students **4F: Training should be specified by the institution and compulsory for [new] supervisors.** All supervisors, whatever their level of experience should have regular training. **4F** 57% require training for new supervisors. 24% require training for all supervisors	Student to have an identified contact (mentor/advisor) to whom they could go for confidential advice and support outside the immediate supervisory team. This person to have proactive periodic contact with the student.	Guidelines should be provided for supervisors and for students setting out their respective responsibilities, with the arrangements to be embodied in institutional procedures. The workload associated with supervision should be identified and managed: this should involve transparent procedures for allocating time to the supervision of students. Periodic [annual] independent institutional review of the supervisory arrangements with the outcomes used to adjust supervising responsibilities. Individual supervisor performance should be reviewed [annually] as part of the academic staff appraisal process.

4. Supervisory arrangements (continued)

Academic standards	Standards for supervisors	Standards for student/institution relations	Administrative process standards
Regular structured [monthly] interactions with at least the 'main' supervisor to provide feedback on progress, with agreed outcomes recorded. **4G: There should be structured interaction with the supervisory team to report, discuss and agree academic and personal progress at least every [3 months]. Outcomes of all such meetings to be recorded as agreed.** 4G 79% define the frequency of contact 51% specify procedures for recording meetings; 33% by formal report or log book	Alternative arrangements to be provided if any member of the supervisory team is unavailable for a significant period, defined by the institution. Specify the means by which a supervisor can seek independent advice on supervisory issues, especially if they have concerns about a student's ability or application to the study programme.	Student has responsibility to record and confirm outcomes of meetings.	

5. Initial review and subsequent progress

Academic standards	Standards for supervisors	Standards for student/institution relations	Administrative process standards
5A: Progress subject to institutionally defined periodic review by a panel of at least [3] research active and relevant academics, the majority of whom are independent of the supervisory team. At least one of the independent panel members should be from a minimum [3a] RAE rated department. An initial panel review to approve the project proposal might include a written or oral presentation, with an interview, on the basis of: ▪ clarity of objectives ▪ feasibility and project plan ▪ knowledge and skills of student and supervisory team ▪ availability of resources ▪ skills training needs. **5A** 72% approve research proposal through independent panel, research degree committee or equivalent, predominantly through a written document. 26% also involve an oral defence Subsequent progress reviews to be assessed by the same (or equivalent) panel by means of one or more of: ▪ open presentation with critical feedback from their peers and department ▪ written progress report ▪ project presentation and viva to panel Panel to provide a written report of the required steps to be taken if areas of concern are identified. Panel to have the power to sanction the student and/or the supervisor.	Supervisory team has a responsibility to support the progress of the student. Responsibility to raise any concerns with the student in advance of each assessment and record them in writing. The supervisory team has the responsibility to support the development of the project proposal, to ensure that it is achievable within the timescale of the degree programme and to confirm that sufficient resources will be available. Supervisory team to have access to panel progress reports to help address any areas of concern identified.	The student has a responsibility to listen to, understand and accept feedback and criticism from the panel and supervisory team, recognising that this may sometimes be negative. Outcome of formal reviews to be provided as written (supportive) guidance to help the student identify the issues to be addressed. Student to be provided with an opportunity to address the concerns of the panel and re-submit within a time period set by the institution. Outcomes subject to academic and administrative appeal by the student.	**5B: Institutional procedures and time limits to be set, and unit performance monitored, for initial review and subsequent progress covering:** ▪ **initial review within [12] months of 'enrolment' and confirm continuation or upgrade to a PhD** ▪ **[annual] review processes** ▪ **implications of the possible outcomes of each assessment** ▪ **criteria for deciding suspension or termination of a student's registration.** Institutional procedures to be communicated to all; supervisory teams, students, panels, examiners, with a clear process for a student to appeal against a decision on academic or administrative grounds (see Section 8). Student given written information on: RDP regulations and registration **5A** 83%; assessment and review procedures 82% Defined mechanisms for advising students if standards have not yet been, or are unlikely to be, achieved at any point in the programme. Project proposal should be subject to agreement by the resource manager that it is consistent with likely resource availability. For project proposals that are developed in advance of allocating students to them, the approval and above agreements should take place before the arrival of any student – with a subsequent check that the student's skills match those needed by the project.

5. Initial review and subsequent progress (continued)

Academic standards	Standards for supervisors	Standards for student/institution relations	Administrative process standards
5C: Final examination to be by a viva with an independent panel of at least two examiners who are research active in relevant fields, at least one of whom is an external examiner. All examiners to be independent of the project and to have had no prior role in its development, implementation or assessment. Operation of the panel managed by an independent chair. **5D: At least one of the examiners to be from a minimum [3a] RAE rated department. Each examiner to provide an independent report on the thesis prior to the viva.**	Supervisory team to support the development of the thesis and advise on preparation for the viva, including offering a practice session. Supervisor and team should be available to the panel if required. Supervisory team to have access to examiners' reports following the viva.	For the final defence, the student should: ▪ be able to comment on the choice of examiners ▪ have the right to request or refuse the presence of the main supervisor as a non-contributing observer (unless asked to contribute by the chair). Examiners' reports to be made available to student following the viva. If required to re-submit, students should be given a written statement of the work to be done to get their degree within an agreed timescale.	Institutional procedures and timings to be set for the examination and made available to the student. Procedures and approval process for the selection of internal and external examiners to use transparent criteria. Training for examiners to be available as part of the institution's staff development. Institutional assessment criteria for the examination to be provided to examiners in writing, with an offer of training. External examiners requested to provide comments on the broader issues of the research training and environment to an appropriate institution-wide body.

6. The development of research and other skills

Academic standards	Standards for supervisors	Standards for student/institution relations	Administrative process standards
6A: Provide training programmes to develop a range of skills and knowledge consistent with the Joint RC/AHRB skills statement, including skills for employment, and provide mechanisms to assess formally the development of these skills. 6A Institutions where more than 50% of students receive training in: - research methodologies 73% - subject specific knowledge 69% - generic research skills (eg project management) 67% - transferable skills (eg teamworking) 43% - employment related skills 27% 6A Respondents with compulsory/credit rated training programme in: - research methodologies 56% - subject specific knowledge 40% - generic research skills 58% - transferable skills 33% - employment related skills 20%	Know about the range of relevant research training courses both within and outside the institution – and ensure the student knows this too. Agree a programme of training with the student, ensure that it is a balanced training programme throughout the RDP. Review progress and give guidance to the student if additional action is needed. Have access to guidance and support in assessing skills and identifying students' training needs. **6B: Student and supervisory team to identify and agree a training needs analysis against the Joint RC/AHRB skills statement as part of the [induction] process. Reviewed [quarterly] to ensure needs are being met.** 6B Student's needs assessed: - through monitoring project progress 47% - by supervisory team 35% - through external involvement such as research training programme 3% - assessment panel 12%	With the supervisory team, agree and document a skills training programme that takes into account prior learning and experience. With the supervisory team, review and record annually, an assessment of the evidence of skills developed. **6C: Student to maintain a jointly agreed record of personal progress.** 6C Student log book requirement cited by 3%	Ensure provision of a programme of training courses consistent with the Joint RC/AHRB skills statement, including skills for employment. Ensure that there is the same access to training for all students, taking into account the needs of part-time students, students with special needs and students remote from the institution. Conduct a periodic independent institutional review of the quality and capacity of training programmes and of students' access to them. The review panel should include external representation such as other academics and prospective employers. Training provision relates 47% or broadly relates 12% to RC/AHRB skills statement
6D: Minimum level of activities defined and monitored to promote breadth and depth of knowledge and experience by means of attendance at internal and external seminars, conferences, discussion forums, [twice annual] 'presentations', teaching, demonstrating Encourage students to publish and/or present papers to benefit from receiving critical feedback from outside the team.	Provide students with an introduction to relevant academic networks to enable them to participate in wider scholarly activity Provide advice on attendance at relevant seminars, conferences, etc. 6D 72% have presentation requirements: 16% annually. 39% encourage students to present outside their unit	Responsibility on students to attend and contribute to seminars and discussion forums. Students actively to seek opportunities to present work and to receive feedback.	Set standards for the extent of such activities and establish a monitoring process to ensure that they are being met.

7. Feedback mechanisms

Academic standards	Standards for supervisors	Standards for student/institution relations	Administrative process standards
7A: Establish and operate confidential feedback mechanisms for: ▪ **current students [column 4]** ▪ **supervisory teams and review panels** ▪ **external parties, eg examiners, funders, collaborative organisations, employers, alumni.** **Incorporate this feedback into the regular review of academic standards and provide information on action taken in response.** Mechanisms to obtain student feedback: - progress reports 33% - student representation 17% - surveys and questionnaires 16% - independent interviews or contact 10%	Supervisors to be responsible for providing feedback to improve RDP provision. Supervisors to be provided with explicit mechanisms to give feedback on RDP performance (confidential where appropriate). Supervisors to receive personal feedback on their own performance to help them improve and identify their own training needs.	Students to be responsible for helping to improve research provision through: ▪ providing feedback to their own supervisory team ▪ providing feedback to the institution by participating in, for example, interviews and focus groups ▪ representation on committees ▪ responding to surveys ▪ as alumni, providing information to first destination surveys and subsequent longitudinal studies.	Establish and operate confidential feedback mechanisms and provide information on actions taken in response: ▪ conduct survey up to [10 weeks] after start, on recruitment, admission and induction procedures ▪ annual survey (or conduct independent focus groups in small departments) ▪ exit questionnaires on student completion ▪ exit interviews (conducted by a relevant person, but not someone from the supervisory team). Research students to be represented on those policy committees relevant to research degree programmes. Student representation on decision-making bodies 77%

8. Appeals and complaints mechanisms			
Academic standards	**Standards for supervisors**	**Standards for student/institution relations**	**Administrative process standards**
To operate transparent, clear criteria for complaints and appeals, which might be made on academic grounds.		Students to be provided with clear explanations about the mechanisms for complaints and appeals.	**8A: Institution to arrange and publicise separate, fair, transparent, robust and consistently applied complaints and appeals procedures, appropriate to all categories of research students.** **8A** Specific complaints and appeals procedures for research students 84% Mechanisms to communicate appeals procedures 92% Mechanisms to communicate results of appeals 89%