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'candidate', for example 'researcher' to describe an individual undertaking a research degree or 'participant' to refer to someone undertaking a professional doctorate. It is recognised that the use of the term 'student' is at odds with many mainland European countries where the doctoral candidate is considered to be an early career member of staff.

Explanations of unfamiliar terms used in this Statement can be found in QAA's [Glossary](#).

Relationship to legislation

Higher education providers are responsible for meeting the requirements of legislation and any other regulatory requirements placed upon them, for example by funding bodies. This Statement does not interpret legislation, nor does it incorporate statutory or regulatory requirements. The responsibility for academic standards remains with the higher education provider who awards the degree.

Higher education providers may need to consider other reference points in addition to this Statement in designing, delivering and reviewing courses. These may include requirements set out by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) and industry or employer expectations.

Sources of information about other requirements and examples of guidance and good practice are signposted within the Characteristics Statement where appropriate.

1 Context, purposes and graduate characteristics

1.1 Context for the doctorate

The doctoral degree is one of the most well-known and well-established postgraduate qualifications. The PhD (or DPhil in some universities) is the main doctoral qualification in the UK. Since the early 1990s, however, the form of the UK doctorate has diversified, leading to differently structured degrees to accommodate the needs of increasingly diverse professions employing doctoral graduates. Doctorates other than the PhD have evolved, leading to the emergence of the titles 'professional' doctorate, and 'practice-based' or 'practice-led' doctorate.

Initially, and beginning with the Doctor of Education (EdD), professional doctorates in different subjects emerged catering for employed professionals returning mid-career to undertake doctoral study. Because of the need for these candidates to re-engage with research methodologies while undertaking employment, they had a significantly different structure from the PhD and included intensive taught modules at the beginning of the programme of study. Many professional and practice-based doctorates have always included structured elements such as lectures and seminars, and have an emphasis on acquiring research and professional skills in addition to conducting original research.

Traditionally, the PhD in the UK has followed an apprentice/master model,¹ but increased attention to research and generic skills training for all doctoral candidates has emerged since 2003 (see Section 3), and as a consequence the PhD has also become more structured, especially in the earlier years of study. Major funders of research training, such as the Research Councils UK and the European Commission, have explicit but flexible requirements for the development opportunities available to the candidates they support financially through studentships.

All UK doctorates, regardless of their form, continue to require the main focus of the candidate's work to demonstrate an original contribution to knowledge in their subject, field or profession, through original research or the original application of existing knowledge or understanding.

Doctorates are delivered through a range of models and modes. Part-time and distance learning are common.

Where doctoral degrees aim to prepare candidates for entry to a particular field of employment, practice or profession, or for progression or transfer within it, a professional, statutory or regulatory body (PSRB) external to the provider may accredit the programme. Graduates of such programmes may be eligible for a particular professional status or may be permitted to enter a further period of practice, study or examination leading to the profession (for example, the EngD may be accredited as meeting the academic requirement for further learning for registration as a Chartered Engineer through the Engineering Council).

PSRBs may be involved in the design and delivery of doctoral degree programmes, especially professional doctorates. They may contribute to the design of any structured elements of the doctorate, including skills training components, and to assessment criteria. Members of PSRBs may also act as external examiners of doctoral candidates. These contributions help to ensure the consistency of outcomes for doctoral graduates in particular subject areas, and in some cases to maintain standards in a relevant profession.

¹ The 'apprenticeship' model dates back to the early nineteenth century, where the PhD candidate followed a form of apprenticeship and was normally awarded the degree in middle age. It is closely associated with F W H Alexander von Humboldt, the German/Prussian physical geographer and anthropologist.

1.2 The doctorate in Europe and internationally

The UK actively contributes to the development of the doctorate worldwide while ensuring that global changes are taken into account in UK policy-making and practice.

It is important to benchmark the UK doctorate in a global environment in order to promote mobility and to strengthen career opportunities for UK doctoral graduates.² Key factors affecting the reputation of UK doctorates include having in place adequate and rigorous quality assurance mechanisms for doctoral programmes, and the ability to demonstrate consistency of standards across varied programmes. This document provides for a comparison between doctorates and demonstrates the equivalence among doctorates of all kinds.

The UK doctorate in all its forms has been confirmed as being in alignment with European-wide guidance, in particular with the [Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area](#). This independent verification involving colleagues from non-UK European countries, as well as from the UK, recognised UK qualifications as having Europe-wide equivalence, which supports the mobility of graduates within Europe. Such mobility continues to increase through programmes such as the EU Erasmus Mundus and Marie Skłodowska-Curie initiatives, and a growing number of UK universities offer joint or jointly supervised doctoral programmes with non-UK European partner providers.

1.3 Purposes of the doctorate

Doctoral degrees are the most individually distinct of the academic qualifications available because of their roots in research and the pursuit of knowledge, and the requirement for the candidate to produce work demonstrating original thought, based on independent study. Whereas until the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries the primary purpose of acquiring a doctorate in the UK was for entry to the academic profession, now this is just one of many options for doctoral graduates, who enter diverse jobs across all sectors, bringing their research skills to bear in their own professional context. It is now the case that most academic staff in UK universities have a doctoral degree; this is an expected qualification for most new entrants to academia and contributes to the ongoing high-quality research output from higher education providers.

1.4 Characteristics of doctoral graduates

The Qualifications Frameworks level descriptor for the doctoral degree includes generic information about what all holders of the doctorate will be able to do, and the qualities and skills that they will have (see the [Qualifications Frameworks](#) for details).

Beyond these core attributes, doctoral researchers will have had diverse life experiences and varying opportunities during their doctoral studies, thus equipping each graduate with a unique range of attributes. However, all doctoral graduates should be able to:

search for, discover, access, retrieve, sift, interpret, analyse, evaluate, manage, conserve and communicate an ever-increasing

methodological processes while recognising, evaluating and minimising the risks involved and impact on the environment

exercise professional standards in research and research integrity, and engage in professional practice, including ethical, legal, and health and safety aspects, bringing enthusiasm, perseverance and integrity to bear on their work activities support, collaborate with and lead colleagues, using a range of teaching, communication and networking skills to influence practice and policy in diverse environments

appreciate the need to engage in research with impact and to be able to communicate it to diverse audiences, including the public

build relationships with peers, senior colleagues, students and stakeholders with sensitivity to equality, diversity and cultural issues.

Furthermore, doctoral researchers are increasingly being encouraged to develop their foreign language and enterprise skills, and to cultivate business acumen.

All doctoral graduates will have developed during the course of their research additional specialist knowledge within their discipline, while those who have studied a professional doctorate are likely to have been required to have particular professional experience that informs the topic of their research studies. They may well also have been required to engage in further study related to that professional field as part of their doctorate.

Finally, doctoral graduates are able to prepare, plan and manage their own career development while knowing

Integrated subject specialist doctorates

Some universities offer 'integrated' programmes in a range of subjects. Such degrees were encouraged by the HEFCE-funded New Route PhD initiative in 2000, and while the use of the term 'New Route PhD' has declined across the UK, the integrated doctorate model has persisted in some subject areas and at some providers.

These programmes are distinguished by the fact that they are more structured in nature, normally with a choice of taught modules and a range of research topic options within the field of study, and include formal lectures, research seminars and workshops at master's or doctoral level during the first year or two years. To accommodate this requirement for taught components, integrated doctorates are often of four years' duration, full-time.

The supervised research project may begin at the point of registration and be undertaken in parallel with the structured taught elements, or may depend on successful completion of taught elements and be undertaken in later years.

Integrated PhDs normally offer exit awards at master's level based on successful completion of taught modules. If the doctorate is in a scientific discipline, they may offer candidates the opportunity to move into a specialist research area in another scientific discipline.

Although some integrated doctoral candidates may have to pass taught elements, the overall assessment for the award is submission of a satisfactory thesis, portfolio or similar output and successfully passing an oral examination with independent examiners, as for all subject specialist study programmes.

Further information about integrated programmes, including programmes where study at master's level is integrated with study at doctoral level, is available in the [Master's Degree Characteristics Statement](#).

Category 2: Doctorates by publication

Examples of doctorates by publication include the [PhD by Publication or the PhD by Published Work\(s\)](#).

Different research degree-awarding bodies have different eligibility requirements and may award this qualification infrequently. They may also differentiate between retrospective publication (published before registration) and concurrent/prospective publications (published within the period of registration).

Characteristics often associated with doctorate by retrospective publication awards are as follows.

Normally awarded on the basis of a thesis containing a series of peer-reviewed academic papers

A doctorate by prospective/concurrent publication is now offered by some providers, particularly in science and engineering subjects, the main characteristics of which are as follows.

A candidate presents a portfolio of interconnected, published research papers contextualised by a coherent narrative, demonstrating overall an original contribution to knowledge. Such publications may include papers, chapters, monographs, books, scholarly editions of a text, technical reports, creative work in relevant areas, or other artefacts.

In the assessment of doctorates by publication, the candidate is examined on these materials and the commentary, sometimes supplemented by a written examination.

in the Industrial PhD, which shares many of the characteristics with the EngD but the qualification title is 'Industrial PhD' and not 'doctorate'.

The main characteristics of professional and practice-based doctorates are as follows.

Professional and practice-based doctorates usually contain taught elements with significant lecture and seminar content, but final award of the doctorate is based on

3.2 Entry to, and progression through, doctoral degrees

Individual higher education providers specify entry requirements for doctoral degrees. Increasingly, doctoral candidates possess a master's degree, but in some subjects it is usual to begin a doctoral programme with a bachelor's degree or, in some circumstances, its professional equivalent.

In some cases, candidates are initially registered for a master's degree and transfer to doctoral status at or around the end of the first year on successfully completing a formal progression event.

Other providers, sometimes to meet the needs of some international funding bodies, register candidates immediately for a doctoral programme and confirm (or otherwise) the doctoral candidate status at the first formal, usually annual, progression event.

Some doctoral degrees are structured around a '1+3' model, with candidates completing a taught master's degree before embarking on doctoral studies. This model was previously related to the funding structures used by some research councils, but the majority have now phased it out.

Some candidates are able to enter doctoral programmes on the basis of their prior professional knowledge and experience.

3.3 The research environment

As is widely acknowledged and highlighted in [The Quality Code, Advice and Guidance Theme: Research Degrees](#), the quality of the research environment is critical to the provision of doctoral degree programmes. Access to an active and vibrant research environment, including contact with other researchers, is fundamental to doctoral candidates' success, irrespective of subject, mode of study, or location. [The Quality Code, Advice and Guidance Theme: Research Degrees](#) summarises some of the conditions that are present in high-quality research environments.

3.4 The role of supervision

The supervisor is fundamental to the support and development of the doctoral candidate. The candidate's relationship with their supervisory team is key to successful completion of a research degree programme. In some higher education providers, supervisors may count their supervisory achievements in making a case for promotion.

Effective supervision is often linked to a candidate's ability to complete their studies within an agreed time frame, and to maintaining a high-quality learning experience in doctoral learning environments.

and Guidance Theme: Research Degrees makes clear, higher education providers support and encourage supervisors to engage in development opportunities.

3.5 Professional development for doctoral candidates

Professional skills development takes different forms in different higher education providers, with some being more formal than others. In some providers such programmes are compulsory (for example, successful completion of some elements being a prerequisite to graduating with a doctorate), but in the majority these are optional but strongly recommended. Some are credit-based, but most are not. The approach in every provider that awards research degrees is informed by The Quality Code, *Advice and Guidance Theme: Research Degrees*; Guiding principle 4 states that 'Research students are afforded opportunities for professional development'.

Providers give their doctoral candidates opportunities to acquire and develop skills and competence in a range of areas, including research skills and techniques, research environment, research management, personal effectiveness, communication skills, networking and teamworking, and career management, as outlined in the [Researcher Development Statement](#), a summary of the [Researcher Development Framework](#), designed to integrate more effectively the requirements of doctoral researchers with those of other researchers at different career stages. The Researcher Development Framework articulates the knowledge, behaviours and attitudes of successful researchers and encourages them to realise their potential'.

Doctoral candidates in the UK are offered a variety of professional development opportunities during their programme. Specifically, they undertake research methods training relevant to their subject area, together with personal

4 Doctoral outcomes and assessment

Assessment is at the heart of doctoral degree standards. The candidate's achievements and research-relevant attributes are tested through the final doctoral assessment, which includes a thorough review of the submitted written materials (and artefacts if appropriate), followed by an oral examination ('viva' or 'viva voce'), at which the candidate defends the thesis. The importance of the single major research project as the principal output of a doctoral degree is demonstrated by the rigour and format of the final assessment process.

4.1 Progress and review

Progression towards achieving a doctorate is assessed during the programme, both at formal progression panels, when gaps in knowledge or skills are identified, and informally through discussions with the candidate's supervisor. Although passing module assessments is a formal part of progression through the programme for some candidates, these milestones do not necessarily contribute to the overall assessment of the doctorate or to the award of the qualification; rather, they represent gateways for progression to the next stage of the programme. In all doctoral programmes there is some form of regular progress review, sometimes an annual progress review or similar, at which each candidate demonstrates his or her suitability to move on to the next stage. At some higher education providers, or in some subject areas, the candidate's progress is reviewed after the first six months, but the first progress review often occurs at the end of the first year (for full-time candidates); as a result of this the candidate's status may change to something more formal, which confirms their candidature. Normally, a neutral assessor or panel of assessors is involved in formal progress reviews, as well as the candidate's supervisor (as an observer). Regular reviews are an important part of the learning process in doctoral programmes as they provide both candidate and supervisor with useful feedback on progress.

4.2 Submission

The doctoral candidate submits a substantial body of original work for assessment. This may vary in length according to the candidate's subject. In mathematics, for example, a candidate may ha

point at which a decision is made, initially by the examiners, about whether he/she can be awarded a doctorate. Formally, examiners of doctoral candidates usually make recommendations to the research degree-awarding body, with a high-level, official committee having final responsibility for deciding to award the degree in the provider's name. This formality is an important part of assuring the quality of

programmes who are usually examined as a cohort and do not normally experience individual oral examinations.

In the UK, the oral examination is usually a 'closed' examination, where only the candidate, examiners, and any independent observer or chair is present. Many providers permit the supervisor to be present to observe the examination, with the candidate's and examiners' permission, but they do not play an active role in the final decision-making process. This differs from some non-

Related guidance and further references

Those interested in the academic standards of doctoral degrees should read this Statement alongside the Qualifications Frameworks, Credit Frameworks and Supporting Resources. As this Statement is concerned with doctoral degrees, it relates particularly to the 'Descriptor for a higher education qualification at level 8 on the FHEQ and SCQF level 12 on the FQHEIS: doctoral degree'.

Those interested in and/or responsible for the design, delivery and review of doctoral programmes should read this document alongside the Quality Code, *Advice and Guidance Theme: Research Degrees*.

Further guidelines, references and resources

The QAA does not endorse the content of external websites.

Smith McGloin, R and Wynne, C (2015) *Structural Changes in Doctoral Education in the UK: A Review of Graduate Schools and the Development of Doctoral Colleges*. Lichfield: UK Council for Graduate Education

Denicolo, P M, Fuller, M, Berry, D, with Raven, C (2010) *A Review of Graduate Schools in the UK* Lichfield: UK Council for Graduate Education

UK Research and Innovation website www.ukri.org

UKRI, Research Council Common Terminology for Postgraduate Training
www.ukri.org/files/legacy/skills/rcukcommonterminologyforpostgraduatetraining2013-pdf

Vitae, Impact and evaluation www.vitae.ac.uk/impact

UK Council for Graduate Education website www.ukcge.ac.uk

UK Council for Graduate Education, *Professional Doctorates in the UK* (2011), available from: www.ukcge.ac.uk

UK Council for Graduate Education/Bruce Christianson and Martin Elliot with Ben Massey, *The Role of Publications and Other Artefacts in Submissions for the PhD*, available from: www.ukcge.ac.uk/article/the-role-of-publications-and-other-artefacts-in-submissions-for-the-uk-phd-201.aspx

Vitae website www.vitae.ac.uk

Vitae, Researcher Development Framework www.vitae.ac.uk/rdf

Vitae, Researcher Development Statement www.vitae.ac.uk/rds

Vitae, What do researchers do? www.vitae.ac.uk/wdrd

Full title	Abbreviation	Description
Professional Doctorate	ProfDoc	ProfDoc is a generic title used for professional doctorates. An alternative but less common abbreviation of the title is DProf.
Doctor of [subject name]	D[subject abbreviation] or [Subject abbreviation]D	A range of doctoral award titles are used, which include specific subject names. This approach is especially common for professional and practice-based doctorates. A wide range of examples exist, including (but by no means limited to) the following: Doctor of Applied Educational and Child Psychology (Ap.Ed and ChildPsy D) Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) Doctor of Clinical Psychology (DClinPsy) Doctor of Dental Surgery (DDS) Doctor of Education (EdD) Doctor of Educational Psychology (DEdPsy) Doctor of Engineering or Engineering Doctorate (EngD) Doctor of Forensic Psychology Practice (Foren.Psy.D) Doctor of Health Research (DHRes) Doctor in Health Sciences (HScD) Doctor in Health Sciences (Clinical) (HScD (Clin)) Doctor of Medicine (MD, or in some cases, MD (Res)) Doctor of Ministry (DMin) Doctorate in Music (DMus) Doctor of Practical Theology (DPT) Doctor of Public Health (DrPH) Doctor of Social Science (DScoSci) Doctor of Theology (ThD).

Appendix 2: Members of the advisory groups for the Doctoral Degree Characteristics

The third edition, published in 2020, was revised by QAA to align the content with the revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education, published in 2018. Proposed revisions were checked by a member of the Postgraduate Advisory Group from 2015.

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