

Plymouth University

Regulatory Framework for Professional Doctorates

1. Introduction

1.1. Professional Doctorates

“A Professional doctorate is an advanced programme of study and research which, whilst satisfying the University criteria for the award of a doctorate, is designed to meet the specific needs of a professional group external to the University, and which develops the capability to develop individuals to work within a professional context” (UKCGE 2002).

The award title of each Professional Doctorate will reflect the relevant profession. The award titles currently approved by Academic Board are:

- Doctor of Professional Administration (DPA)
- Doctor of Business Administration (DBA)
- Doctor of Education (EdD)
- Doctor of Clinical Psychology (DClinPsy)

2. Programme/scheme structure

- 2.1. The programme of study for a Professional Doctorate combines taught modules and research elements. The total credit value of a Professional Doctorate will be 540 credits, of which the taught modules will normally comprise 120 credits, and the research element 420 credits. Exceptions to these guidelines will be considered where it can be demonstrated that there is a particular professional requirement for a higher proportion of taught credits or where it is a requirement of an accrediting external profession. In all cases the credit value of the research element must exceed the taught element (QAA Code of Practice section 1 2004). In the case of APL (see section 4) a minimum total of 420 credits to include the research element must be studied.
- 2.2. A minimum of 420 credits must normally be at level 8. The Level of taught modules will be determined at the time of approval and in accordance with University guidelines.
- 2.3. The taught modules associated with a Professional Doctorate must take due cognisance of the joint skills statements published by the Research Councils and must include one or more research methods modules.
- 2.4. A Professional Doctorate may include maximum of 120 credits at Level M (normally research methods and/or specialist options); such exceptions must be approved at the time of approval.
- 2.5. Where an Accrediting Professional Body requires an alternative programme structure, exceptions must be approved at the time of validation.

- 2.6. Taught modules will normally be delivered within the University's approved academic year structure in order to ensure appropriate HESES returns (i.e. October or January start dates), although the University acknowledges that the needs of different student groups may require alternative scheduling. This will be agreed provided that there is a clear rationale and the students can be supported effectively.
- 2.7. The standard academic year for students registered on a Professional Doctorate will be 48 weeks.
- 2.8. The design of a Professional Doctorate will include provision for an appropriately designated Postgraduate award for any student who exits the programme after successful completion of the taught modules but without successfully completing the research project. The name of this award may vary depending on the number of credits completed in the taught element and will be clearly designated in the documentation for approval and subsequently in the student handbook.

3. Admissions

- 3.1. Students seeking admission to a Professional Doctorate should normally hold an Honours degree or postgraduate diploma of a UK University or of the CNAA or other qualifications accepted by the programme team as equivalent, together with relevant professional experience in the field associated with the programme. Clear definitions of relevant experience must be provided by the programme team and approved at the time of validation.
- 3.2. An applicant seeking admission on the basis of a degree which was not delivered and assessed in English will also be required to provide evidence of English language competence (normally IELTS 6.5-7.0).
- 3.3. Where appropriate, admission to a Professional Doctorate will be dependent on an assessment of the student's proposed field of research, to ensure that the University is able to provide appropriate facilities and supervision to support that research. Where the decision on a research topic is to be developed during the taught element of the course, it will be the responsibility of the course leader to determine that the University is able to provide the appropriate facilities and supervision to support that research prior to approval of the topic.

4. Accreditation of prior learning (see also University Regulations on APCL/APEL)

- 4.1. Accreditation of prior learning is based on the concept of specific credit (that is that the learning outcomes of the prior learning are directly equivalent to those of modules from which the student will be exempt as a result). Prior learning may be certificated (APCL) or experiential (APEL).
- 4.2. A student may apply for accreditation of prior learning in relation to taught modules within a Professional Doctorate up to a maximum of 120 credits. To qualify for the award of a Professional Doctorate of the University of Plymouth, a student must have completed a total of 420 specific credits, including the research element of the programme, at the University.

- 4.3. Accreditation of prior learning may be claimed in relation to learning at M or D Level acquired during the seven years immediately preceding an application for admission to a Professional Doctorate. An application for APCL must be supported by the appropriate certification and information about the associated learning outcomes. Programme regulations will specify the nature of the processes adopted for accreditation of prior experiential learning, which must include a formal assessment of associated learning outcomes.
- 4.4. Where it is agreed that certificated prior learning to which marks are attached may contribute towards an award, a decision must be made¹ at the same time as to whether the marks, in their original or an amended form, will be included on the student record.

5. Period of Registration

- 5.1. A Professional Doctorate may be studied in full time or part time mode, or a combination of both.

Taught modules

- 5.2. In full-time mode the taught element of the programme will normally last 1 academic year. A student electing to study part time will normally be expected to complete the taught modules within two years. A student may be registered on the taught element of the programme for no more than one further year over and above the normal duration. Where a programme is approved with a higher proportion of taught elements then the normal guidelines outlined above can be extended by a year in each case and this must be clearly justified in the approval documentation.
- 5.3. Students who wish to withdraw from a taught module must notify the Faculty Office of their intention in writing by the end of the sixth week after commencement of the Professional Doctorate programme in the academic year in which that module was due to be taken. A student who does not formally withdraw and subsequently does not complete the module will be deemed to have failed the module. Students who withdraw from a module at this stage will not be allowed to commence an alternative module in the same term.

Research element

- 5.4. The research element of the programme may be studied in either full time mode (in which the case the student will be required to complete and submit the research project within three years) or in part time mode, in which case the time limits for completion and submission of the research project will be five years.
- 5.5. A student who wishes to withdraw from the research element of the programme must notify the Doctoral College Office in writing by the date indicated in the programme handbook. A student who does not do so and subsequently does not present themselves for assessment will be deemed to have failed the Research element.

¹ The decision must involve the programme leader and Chair of the Award Board. The University commends the establishment of APL committees, based around this core membership, to consider applications for accreditation of prior learning and develop appropriate procedures and case law.

6. Assessment: taught modules

- 6.1. The purposes of assessment in relation to the taught modules are:
- objectively to measure a student's achievements against the learning outcomes of the module
 - to assist student learning by providing appropriate feedback on performance
 - to provide a reliable and consistent basis for the recommendation of an appropriate award
- 6.2. The assessment for each module will be detailed in the Definitive Module Record and Programme Handbook for each Professional Doctorate award. This will specify whether assessment is formative and/or summative; and the elements contributing to summative module assessment (e.g. whether coursework or examination or a combination of both).
- 6.3. Where assessment is by a combination of elements, e.g. coursework and examination, the weightings of each element must be stated. An element of assessment may include more than one individual item of assessment, but each item of assessment must account for a minimum of 25% of the overall module mark.

Successful completion of a module

- 6.4. The pass mark for each taught module is 50% with a Pass/Fail decision.
- 6.5. Exceptionally, a module may be approved with the requirement that a student achieve a pass (50%) in each of the coursework/examination elements.

7. Procedure in the event of failure in the taught programme

- 7.1. Where a student fails to achieve a pass in one or more taught modules, the Award Board may at its discretion, based on a judgement of the student's overall performance and potential:
- permit the student to be reassessed in the module(s), in whole or in part of each element of assessment, at the next available opportunity (the Board will determine whether the assessment will take the same form as the original)²; or
 - permit the student to retake the module(s), with or without attendance, by a date to be determined by the Board; or
 - require the student to withdraw from the programme³.
- 7.2. The student will fail the reassessment if they do not achieve the module pass mark following completion of the reassessed elements. The original rule for passing the module will apply for a student being reassessed in or retaking both elements of assessment.

² An Award Board will not normally permit a student to be reassessed in more than 60 credits

³ An Award Board will not normally require a student to withdraw unless s/he has failed and cannot under 7.3 below have a further attempt at a module.

7.3. A student may be assessed in a taught module contributing to a Professional Doctorate on no more than two occasions. The maximum mark for any module which has been failed and is being reassessed/ retaken will be 50%.

7.4. *University Regulations on Extenuating Circumstances apply also to Professional Doctorate programmes. What follows is a summary of the key provision.*

If a student has failed (or failed to sit/submit) all or part of an assessment associated with a taught module due to valid extenuating circumstances, the student has a right to sit/submit the assessment as if for the first time⁴, in a form and by a date to be determined by the relevant Award Assessment Board. Similarly, if the Board believes that although the student passed the assessment(s) his/her performance was adversely affected by extenuating circumstances, the student has a right to sit/submit again as if for the first time⁵.

7.5. A student who, for whatever reason, leaves the programme after completion of the taught modules but before completion of the research project may be eligible for an appropriate postgraduate award as stipulated in the approved programme documentation.

8. Research element

8.1. The design of a Professional Doctorate should enable a student to develop a research project proposal in the context of one or more taught modules.

8.2. A student must submit his/her research proposal, on Form RDC1, to the programme manager and his/her prospective supervisor (as identified by the programme manager) before completing the taught element. Once agreed with the programme manager and prospective supervisor, the proposal will be submitted to the Doctoral College for approval of the supervisory team to ensure compliance with the QAA Code of Practice.

8.3. A student may not proceed to the research element of the programme unless and until s/he has passed all the taught modules.

8.4. Enrolment for the research project element of a Professional Doctorate may take place on 1st October, 1st January or 1st April. A student will be expected to enrol on the first of those dates following successful completion of the taught modules.

8.5. The regulations applying to the research element will be those agreed by the University in respect of research degree candidates. However, the following provisions of those regulations will not apply to students on the Professional Doctorate route:

- List of exceptions to follow

⁴ The use of the phrase 'as if for the first time' throughout Section 10 should be read as meaning that the student will be offered another attempt without penalty, hence if the assessment affected by the circumstances was a second/third attempt, the student will be offered a sit/submit as if for the second/third time, and so on.

⁵ If the student opts to sit/submit the assessment, the mark achieved will stand, even if it is lower than that which the Board was initially prepared to offer.

9. Awards

- 9.1. Following successful completion of both the taught modules and the research project, candidates will be awarded the relevant Professional Doctorate.
- 9.2. To qualify for an award a student must have achieved the required number of credits within these Regulations and have satisfied any programme-specific requirements.
- 9.3. The circumstances may be such that the student is known to be unable to complete work which has been failed, or which s/he has failed to sit/submit. If the Award Assessment Board is nonetheless satisfied that the student would have qualified for the award had the circumstances not existed, the Board may make an Aegrotat award⁶. An Aegrotat award will not normally be made in the case of the MRes.

*The following are governed by separate University Regulations:
Subject Assessment Panel/ Award Assessment Board: composition, role and responsibilities
Student Appeals*

Approved by the Academic Board 8 March 2000;
Updated September 2001. Minor amendments
September 2004, September 2005, October 2006,
July 2013, September 2019

Vice-Chancellor

⁶ Formally the student must confirm in writing his/her acceptance of the award, but it is understood that there may be circumstances in which this is not possible (e.g. in the case of posthumous awards, or those made to students whose medical circumstances make it impossible for them to give informed consent). In such cases, the written authorisation of the chair of the Award Assessment Board, confirming the circumstances in which the award is made, will be sufficient for the award to be conferred.

Procedural notes

1. Programme planning and approval

Preliminary approval

- 1.1 Programme planning approval must be obtained from the Faculty and the University through the postgraduate planning approval process, including completion of the postgraduate planning approval form which must be signed off by the Director of the Doctoral College.
- 1.2 Following planning approval, a programme planning team must be established.
- 1.3 The minimum period from planning approval to the entry of the first student cohort is 18-24 months.

Approval process

- 1.4 The programme planning team are required to produce the following documentation for the approval events:
 - Programme document
 - Draft student handbook
 - Approved resources statement
 - Completed Web announcement form
 - Written confirmation of intent from Professional partners
- 1.5 The approval process requires a formal University approval event. Faculties may if they so wish hold a faculty approval process before this event.
- 1.6 The University approval event will normally be chaired by the Director of the Doctoral College (or nominee), and will include a panel of academic staff not associated with the development of the programme and with proven experience of Doctoral level supervision and examination, together with representative(s) from the relevant profession.

2 Student registration and enrolment

- 2.1 Students who register on a Professional Doctorate will be registered as post-graduate research students (PGR).
- 2.2 Students will be required to re-enrol annually on their programme.
- 2.3 The University student file for each student on a Professional Doctorate programme will be held by the Doctoral College; key information will also be held in the relevant Faculty Office.

- 2.4 The determination and recording of student progress on taught modules, including the organization of assessment boards, the maintenance of the student record on UNIT-e and the issue of the student results information and transcript will be the responsibility of the relevant Faculty Office. During the research element of the programme, responsibility for the student's progress record will transfer to the Doctoral College.

3 External examiners and Assessment Boards

Taught programme

- 3.1 Each taught module must be scrutinized by an external examiner, who must have experience of acting as an external examiner at Masters level or above. Where taught modules are shared with other postgraduate programmes, the external examiner may also be jointly appointed.

- 3.2A joint Subject Assessment Panel/Award Assessment Board will be established for the taught element of each Professional Doctorate. Its role will be to confirm student marks, action in case of failure, and student progression. Where taught modules are shared with other postgraduate programmes, the Subject Assessment Panel established for those programmes will report also to the Professional Doctorate Award Board.

Research element

- 3.3 The research element will be assessed in accordance with the regulations for research degrees (see Research Degrees Handbook), that is, by 2 independent examiners one of which is external to the University and the examination will comprise a thesis component and a viva voce.
- 3.4 In the event of a less than satisfactory examination of the research element, the examiners will be permitted to recommend a Masters award.