

PhD Award Criteria

A view from the UK

WP3: Award Criteria & Quality
Standards in Doctoral Education:
Day 1

Award Criteria in Doctoral Education

- Defining the PhD
 - Which award – types of PhD
- UK Criteria for the award of PhD
- The PhD candidate as an early stage researcher

UK doctoral awards

- Doctor of Philosophy (PhD or DPhil)
- PhD by publication
- Integrated PhD
- Professional & practice-based (or practitioner) doctorates
- Higher doctorates (typically the Doctor of Science, DSc or ScD and DLitt)

What is a (UK) PhD?

- Doctoral degrees are awarded for the creation and interpretation, construction and/or exposition of **knowledge which extends the forefront of a discipline**, usually through **original research**.
- All UK doctorates require **the main focus** of the candidate's work to be their **contribution to knowledge in their discipline or field**, through original research, or the original application of existing knowledge or understanding.
- In professional and practice-based doctorates the research may be undertaken in the workplace and so have a direct effect on organisational policy and change, as well as improving personal practice

UK Award Criteria

- the creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline, and merit publication
- a systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge that is at the forefront of an academic discipline or area of professional practice

UK Award Criteria

- the general ability to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge, applications or understanding at the forefront of the discipline, and to adjust the project design in the light of unforeseen problems
- a detailed understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry.

UK doctorate & Bologna

- 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 (EHEA)*, through a verification process led by QAA in 2008

PhDs develop researchers

‘The main outcome of doctoral education [is] the early-stage researchers’

‘The outcome is ..a doctorate holder with specific research and transferable skills and experiences, which can be used in a wide range of careers.’

PhD - skills & abilities

- make informed judgements on complex issues in specialist fields, often in the absence of complete data, and be able to communicate their ideas and conclusions clearly and effectively to specialist and non-specialist audiences
- continue to undertake pure and/or applied research and development at an advanced level, contributing substantially to the development of new techniques, ideas or approaches.

PhD & Employability

- Graduates will have the **qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment** requiring the exercise of **personal responsibility** and largely **autonomous initiative** in complex and unpredictable situations, in professional or equivalent environments

What is 'Quality' in PhD programmes?

WP3: Award Criteria & Quality Standards in Doctoral Education:
Day 2

‘Doctoral education was the ground where scholars could plant their ideas and pass them on to the next generation. a rite of passage [that] happens in the private sphere where ideas reign free from interference from institutions.

.... In this context, quality assurance can almost amount to sacrilege, disturbing a ritual, which for centuries has been a cornerstone of academic identity.’

Quality Standards

- Quality assurance of the award
 - The QA cycle of a PhD
 - Institutional monitoring
 - State/ Government monitoring
- Quality enhancement activities to support QA
 - Training and development of staff & students

UK national framework for PhDs

- Institutions that offer research degree programmes need to align with the QAA Quality Code for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, in Chapter B11: Research degrees (June 2012)
- This section of the Code covers 18 ‘indicators’ following areas:

PhD programmes & Research Strategy

It is necessary to **develop specific systems for quality assurance in doctoral education** based on the diverse institutional missions and, crucially, **linked to the institutional research strategy**. For this reason, **there is a strong link between the assessment of the research of the institution and the assessment of the research environments that form the basis of doctoral education**. Assessment of the academic quality of doctoral education should be based on peer review and be sensitive to disciplinary differences.

Quality & Accountability

In order to be accountable for the quality of doctoral programmes, **institutions should develop indicators based on institutional priorities such as individual progression, net research time, completion rate, transferable skills, career tracking and dissemination of research results for early stage researchers**, taking into consideration the professional development of the researcher as well as the progress of the research project

QA - Assessment procedures

Some common features of research degree assessment procedures in the UK system:.

- 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.