

Programme Specification for PhD

This document applies to Academic Year 2022/23 onwards

1.	Awarding institution/body	University of Worcester
2.	Teaching institution	University of Worcester
3.	Programme accredited by	n/a
4.	Final award or awards	PhD
5.	Programme title	Doctor of Philosophy
6.	Pathways available	n/a
7.	Mode and/or site of delivery	Supervision, face-to-face and virtual, with taught elements (delivered through blended learning) for the embedded PG Cert and the wider Researcher Development Programme
8.	Mode of attendance and duration	Full time and Part time
9.	UCAS Code	n/a
10.	Subject Benchmark statement and/or professional body statement	The programme is mapped on to Vitae's Researcher Development Framework and on to the QAA's Chapter B11 of the Quality Code
11.	Date of Programme Specification preparation/ revision	August 2016, August 2017 - AQU amendments, August 2018 – AQU amendments, February 2019 – AQU amendments, January 2021 – Research School June 2022- Research School amendments

12. Educational aims of the programme

The programme aims to equip students with the skills to design, research and write research-based project to the standard expected at PhD by the University of Worcester.

The PhD thesis shall comprise an integrated whole, present a coherent argument, and form a distinct contribution to the knowledge of the subject and afford evidence of originality by the discovery of new facts and/or by the exercise of independent critical power.

13. Intended learning outcomes and learning, teaching and assessment methods

Students completing the programme will have acquired a range of analytical and presentational skills appropriate to a wide range of professional activities and will be able to:

1. Conduct enquiry leading to the creation and interpretation of new knowledge through original research or other advanced scholarship;
2. Frame questions about complex problems and conduct research at a high level to answer those questions;
3. Offer critical appraisal and understanding of other research in the field of theory and/or practice;
4. Gather evidence of different kinds from different sources;
5. Demonstrate a critical understanding of the methodology of enquiry;
6. Show the ability to conceptualise, design and implement a programme of research which will generate new knowledge at the forefront of the discipline or field of practice, including the capacity to adjust the programme in the light of emergent issues and understandings;
7. Make independent judgement of issues and ideas in the field of research and/or practice and is able to communicate and justify that judgement to appropriate audiences;

8. Critically reflect on their work and evaluate its strengths and weaknesses, including understanding validation procedures;
9. Present research findings effectively in both oral and written form reflecting technical proficiency in the English language.

Learning, teaching and assessment

All students must engage in and pass a PG Cert in Research Methods during the early stages of the PhD (by the end of Year 1 for Full Time students and the end of Year 2 for Part Time students) in order to develop the skills, knowledge and understanding to plan, design and implement a programme of research. They are also expected to engage in a wider Research Student Development Programme across their PhD in order to continue to develop their research skills but also to develop skills to enable the successful dissemination of their research and to prepare them for employment beyond the end of their PhD.

The main mode of “teaching” is supervision from a team of experts who provide guidance and support and feedback on the student’s programme of research at all stages from its inception to its implementation to the delivery of the thesis.

The student’s progress is assessed by the supervisory team on an ongoing basis but more formally through an Annual Progress Review (APR).

The student is subject to summative assessment through the modules in the PG Cert and ultimately through the thesis and associated oral examination (*viva voce*) at the end of their programme.

Teaching

For the PG Cert and the wider Research Student Development programme, students are taught through a combination of interactive workshops, lectures, online courses, practical sessions (including lab sessions), and fieldwork as appropriate to the student’s field of study:

- Interactive workshops take a variety of formats and are intended to enable the application of learning through discussion and small group activities.
- Lectures are focused on imparting high-level general information.
- Online courses are focused on developing general research skills.
- Practical sessions and fieldwork are focused on developing subject specific research skills and are mainly delivered by the supervisory team.

Supervision is undertaken by a team of 2-3 supervisors one of whom is designated as the Director of Studies who will normally be the primary supervisor, responsible for overseeing student progress, managing supervisory relations and ensuring the student complies with regulatory requirements and relevant processes. Supervision will be undertaken through meetings, face-to-face and virtual, and through detailed comment and feedback on written work.

Contact time

Full Time students can expect 30 hours of supervision from the team which will include supervisory meetings and other contact but also time spent on providing feedback on written work.

Part Time students can expect 20 hours of supervision from the team which will include supervisory meetings and other contact but also time spent on providing feedback on written work.

Independent self-study

A PhD student is expected to engage extensively in independent self-study. A Full Time student should expect to work up to 37 hours per week on their programme of research and a Part Time

student up to 18.5 hours per week; some of this time will involve engagement with the PG Cert, the Research Student Development Programme and with supervision but this will vary week to week and year to year.

Teaching staff

The PG Cert, and associated Research Student Development Programme, is delivered by a teaching team whose expertise and knowledge are closely matched to the content of the modules on the course. They will be supported by professors and other senior researchers across the University, particularly in the delivery of subject specific research skills, approaches and methods.

Supervisory teams are required collectively to bring the expertise and experience to guide and support the student through their programme of research.

14. Assessment strategy

Students are assessed in 4 ways during the programme:

- a) Their skills development is assessed through the embedded PG Cert in Research Methods which they must complete and pass to progress with their PhD programme.
- b) Their progress against the programme of research which they develop with the guidance and support of their supervisory team and through the PG Cert is assessed through Annual Progress Review.
- c) Their progress is also kept under constant review by their supervisory team.
- d) Finally, all students must submit a thesis and defend this thesis at an oral examination (*viva voce*) which determines if they have met the Learning Outcomes and if they should be awarded a PhD.

PG Cert

In line with the University of Worcester's Assessment Policy, the assessment strategy on the PG Cert has been designed to help ensure that students meet the learning outcomes for the course. Assessments have been linked towards facilitating the development of the skills this programme is designed to foster, whether the academic skills of knowledge and methodological application, the intellectual cognitive skills required for the successful completion of their PhD, practice skills or transferrable skills applicable both to their ongoing study but also their future career (e.g. developing digital literacy, techniques of data collection, or skills in project design, management and execution). While our assessment strategy does seek to offer students a variety of challenges appropriate to the level of study, each preparing them in a different way for their PhD programme of research, that variety is also aimed towards fostering broader skills that will benefit them beyond their research degree programme. This is built on through the wider Research Student Development Programme.

Annual Progress Review

All students will be subject to an Annual Progress Review, the first of which will take place no later than 12 months after initial registration then every 12 months thereafter until the submission of the thesis.

The Annual Progress Review (APR) is designed to complement the ongoing monitoring of research student progress by the supervisory team. It sets out to provide an independent assessment of a student's progress against the requirements of the degree and the student's own programme of research as agreed with the supervisory team. The review is designed: to allow student and supervisors to reflect on progress; to provide assurance to the University that the student's progress is as expected and the programme of research is fit for purpose; to identify any problems or issues that have emerged over the previous 12 months; and to establish an action plan to address any problems or issues thus enabling the student to get back on track.

Supervisory Review

It is the role of the supervisory team, in particular the Director of Studies, to keep the student's progress under regular review throughout the programme of research and to raise any concerns as soon as these arise.

Examination

The assessment of the programme as a whole is based on a two-stage process:

- an assessment of a written thesis (and where appropriate other documentation or artefacts such a performance, exhibition or artwork) by an examination panel of 2-3 examiners, who are experts in the field of study
- an oral examination at which the student is asked to "defend" their thesis in front of the same examination panel, demonstrating that the written thesis is their work, that they are aware of its strengths and weaknesses and that they are able to explain and justify any issues or problems in the written thesis

15. Programme structures and requirements

PG Cert

Please see the Programme Specification for the PG Cert in Research Methods.

Annual Progress Review

The review will be undertaken initially by the MPhil/PhD Course Leader or nominee whose role is to assess the student's progress against the programme of research and to make recommendations to University's Research Degrees Board (responsible for oversight of the PhD programme from registration to examination).

The Course Leader's assessment will be based on consideration of written documentation submitted by the student, the Director of Studies and Research School. The written documentation required for review will be determined by the stage the student has reached in their programme and will be set out in the relevant Course Handbook.

The Course Leader will make one of the following recommendations to Research Degrees Board for each student reviewed:

- i. The student's progress and standard of work is at or above expectations; the student may progress and no further action is required.
- ii. The student's progress and standard of work is at or above expectations but there are some outstanding issues identified by the Course Leader (usually certain deadlines that have not been met, for example, completion of the PG cert or ethical approval); the student may progress subject to providing a satisfactory response to the issues outlined by the Course Leader by an agreed deadline.
- iii. The student's progress and/or standard of work is below expectations and the student should be referred to an APR panel.

If the Course Leader has concerns around the standard of work produced, based on feedback from the supervisory team, they may call on an external expert to review the work submitted. Where subject expertise exists at Worcester, it is expected that a member of UW staff will normally be used. Where there is limited expertise internally then an external expert from outside the University can be used.

If the Course Leader is of the view that the student's progress is being limited by their supervisory team, they may refer this to the Research Degrees Board. Research Degrees Board will consider and confirm or reject the Course Leader's recommendations.

Where a student's response to the Course Leader is not satisfactory, the Course Leader may:

- i. Refer the student to an APR panel.
- ii. Request further information by a specified deadline. If the Course Leader is still not satisfied with the response, they should then refer the student to an APR panel.

Where a student does not provide documentation or a response by the deadline then the Course Leader will normally refer the student to an APR panel. A student will not be referred to an APR panel when a delay is caused by information not being provided by the RS or Supervisory Team.

The APR panel will normally include:

- Senior researcher (Chair)
- Course Leader or nominee
- A subject expert nominated by the MPhil/PhD Course Leader who is independent of the supervisory team

The Panel will first consider the written documentation and then, normally, convene a meeting with the student and the Director of Studies. However, the Panel may on occasion make its recommendations without convening a meeting if it feels it has enough information.

The Panel will produce a report setting out progress against the expectations and make one of the following recommendations to RDB:

- i. The student's progress and standard of work is at or above expectations. The student may progress and no further action is required.
- ii. The student's progress and standard of work is at or above expectations but there are some outstanding issues identified by the Panel; the student may progress subject to providing a satisfactory response to the issues outline by the Panel by an agreed deadline.
- iii. The student's progress and/or standard of work is below expectations and the student must respond to a set of actions determined by the Panel by a specified deadline.
- iv. The student's progress and/or standard of work is well below expectations and the student must respond to a set of actions determined by the panel *and* must meet with the Panel again on an agreed date, normally within 6 months of the original meeting.

The Panel will consider the student's responses to the actions specified and may recommend the following to RDB:

- i. The student has responded satisfactorily to the actions specified and no further action is required.
- ii. The student has not responded satisfactorily to the actions specified and should be given a specified timeframe to provide a further response to the Panel.

If the Panel deems that this further response is not satisfactory, the Panel may recommend that RDB withdraw the student from the programme.

Where a student does not respond by any deadline without explanation, RDB may withdraw the student from the programme.

Where a student's progress is deemed below expectations in two consecutive Annual Progress Reviews, RDB may withdraw the student from the programme without need for further action.

Transfer to PhD

Transfer to PhD will normally be APR 2 for full time students and APR 4 for part time students.

At this transfer point, the student and DoS will always attend a meeting of an APR panel whose role at this point is to assess whether the student is able to transfer from MPhil to PhD.

The Panel will produce a report setting out progress against the expectations and make one of the following recommendations to RDB:

- i. The student may transfer to PhD and no further action is required.
- ii. The student may transfer to PhD subject to a satisfactory response to the comments of the Panel by an agreed deadline.
- iii. The student may not transfer to PhD at this time but must re-submit for transfer in 6-12 months, taking account of the Panel's comments. A new APR panel will be convened to consider the resubmission.
- iv. The student may not transfer to PhD and should submit for an MPhil taking into account the Panel's comments.
- v. Recommend the student be withdrawn from their programme of study. Withdrawal might be recommended on academic grounds or because there is insufficient time within the student's 'maximum registration period' to complete the work required for either MPhil or PhD.

Examination

The requirements for the thesis are as follows:

- 30-40,000 words for a thesis in science, including footnotes, but excluding the table of contents, abstract, tabulated data, diagrams, any appendices and the bibliography:
- 60-80,000 words for a text-based thesis in the humanities, creative arts or social sciences (including business and management studies), including footnotes, but excluding the table of contents, abstract, tabulated data, diagrams, any appendices and the bibliography
- 30-80,000 words for a practice-based thesis in the humanities, creative arts or social sciences (including business and management studies), including footnotes, but excluding the table of contents, abstract, tabulated data, diagrams, any appendices and the bibliography:

There will be a +10% margin for the maximum word count. There is no fixed penalty for exceeding this word count but, in line with the University's 'Policy on Word Count' the examiner will not normally consider any work after the +10% margin has been reached.

The length of a thesis for a PhD that includes material other than in written form must be discussed between the student and supervisor at the beginning of the programme. This must be discussed again at APR. The final word limit will be agreed during the Transfer to PhD APR meeting.

Where a programme of research involves the student's own creative work and this forms, as a point of origin or reference, a significant part of the intellectual enquiry, then the 'thesis' is understood to mean the totality of the work submitted for the degree. For this reason, the 'practice' element must be accessible to the Examiners prior to the *viva voce* examination. Where it is not practical to replicate creative work, it must be displayed appropriately, catalogued and labelled for the examiners to view.

The oral examination (*viva voce*) will normally take the form of a meeting of 1-3 hours to discuss the content of the thesis, although the timeframe may on occasion extend beyond this.

16. QAA and professional academic standards and quality

The programme is designed to meet with the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education - Chapter B11: Research degrees

It also meets with the FHEQ qualification descriptors at level 7 and 8.

It has also been designed in accordance with Vitae's Researcher Development Framework.

17. Support for students

Students are provided with:

- direct support from their supervisory team
- support from the MPhil/PhD Course Leader for their School
- access to a wider programme of Research Student Development that builds on and scaffolds the PG Cert
- day to day support through the Research School
- access to a variety of resources through our VLE focused on research students
- training opportunities for career planning through the Research School and the Careers Service
- support through the International Office for overseas students
- support through the Language Unit for International Students
- access to the Disability and Dyslexia Service
- access to wider Student Support services

18. Admissions

Admission requirements

For PhD:

- A Postgraduate Masters Degree in a discipline which is appropriate to the proposed programme of study; or
- First or Upper Second Class Honours Degree or equivalent award in an appropriate discipline; or
- The applicant has appropriate research or professional experience at postgraduate level which has resulted in published work, written reports or other appropriate evidence of achievement.

Recognition of Prior Learning

Students with relevant previous study at postgraduate level or with extensive experience may be considered eligible for recognition of prior learning for elements of the embedded PG Cert (see relevant programme specification).

Admissions policy

Students will in some cases discuss their research interests and potential research project informally with potential supervisors prior to submitting an application. This will help establish, for both parties, that staff have the necessary expertise to supervise the proposal and to identify whether the intended research project would require additional, available resources.

All applications are submitted to the Research School and passed to the relevant MPhil/PhD Course Leader for initial consideration. In the application form, applicants are required to outline a research proposal for their intended project. Applications are assessed both on the selection criteria below and in terms of: the correlation between the proposed project; the students' prior experience and achievement; and the availability of necessary supervisory expertise.

Additional selection criteria will be made clear prior to an interview. Where the application has potential, an interview will be scheduled with a panel comprising two members of academic staff (as specified as an indicator of academic quality in Chapter B11: 'Research Degrees' of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education) one of whom should be the potential supervisor. Completion of an interview checklist will allow for a rigorous and measurable evaluation of the candidate's strengths and their suitability for the programme.

International applications will, initially, be checked by the Admissions Officer against NARIC. Copies of all certificates will be required before an unconditional offer can be made to the student. If the application has potential, the interview procedure detailed above will be followed, with the interview conducted (e.g. via Skype or Microsoft Teams if necessary).

Admissions/selection criteria

The admission of any individual applicant to the PhD programme is judged by the proposed supervisor in conjunction with the relevant MPhil/PhD Course Leader who acts as admissions tutor. Those judgements may be supported, as appropriate, by other members of academic staff, the Research School, and the International Office.

Where an offer is made, details of the offer and conditions are passed back to the Research School where a comprehensive offer letter and contract are produced. For international students, the information and offer conditions are passed to the relevant personnel in Student Services who can also provide the student with additional support and guidance (for example, to obtain a visa, accommodation).

International students will also be required to demonstrate that they have the appropriate level of written and spoken English (normally IELTS score of 6.5 with no less than 6 in any component). Entry qualifications for international students are guided by the National Academic Recognition Information Centre's (NARIC) advice on international qualifications.

An offer of a place on the PhD will be made when the following conditions are satisfied:

- The applicant meets the specified entry requirements.
- The School has the supervisory capacity and expertise to support the research project outlined in the application form.
- The proposal outlined has the potential to become a viable research project both at doctoral level (i.e. in accordance with QAA descriptors) and with regard to the context of the subject area and the School's existing research expertise and strategic priorities.

19. Regulation of assessment

The embedded PG Cert operates under the University's Taught Courses Regulatory Framework (TCRF) (see separate programme specification).

The PhD programme operates under the Research Degree Regulatory Framework (RDRF).

Examination Arrangements

The Director of Studies must identify examiners for the PhD who must then be approved by Research Degrees Board. There should at least 2 but no more than 3 independent examiners. At least one examiner must be external to the University in all cases but where the regulations require it the whole panel must be external. The panel must also have the expertise and experience as set out in the regulations.

Examination arrangements must be submitted a minimum of three months in advance of the proposed date of the viva voce and considerably earlier for a PhD involving practice.

Examination

Each examiner is required to read and assess the thesis and to submit an independent preliminary report to the University before any *viva voce* is held. As part of that assessment, each examiner must consider whether the thesis or portfolio and critical overview provisionally satisfies the University's requirements for the degree concerned and, where possible, make an appropriate provisional decision, subject to the outcome of the *viva voce* examination.

The panel for the *viva voce* will consist of the same examiners and an independent chair who oversees the conduct of the viva. The Director of Studies or other supervisor may attend but not participate with the permission of the student.

Examination Outcomes

These, along with reassessment outcomes, are detailed in the Research Degree Regulatory Framework.

Where amendments are required, these will be provided in detail by the examiners.

Where the outcome is the degree not be awarded, the examiners are required to prepare an agreed statement of the deficiencies of the thesis or portfolio and critical overview and give the reasons for their decision, to be forwarded to the student by the University.

Where the examiners cannot reach an agreement on the outcome, they must submit separate reports based on which the University will reach a decision.

Reassessment

The examiners will make the decision that the student be permitted to resubmit for the degree concerned and to be reassessed when the work submitted does not meet the required level of the award.

Only one opportunity for reassessment of the thesis shall be allowed.

20. Graduate destinations, employability and links with employers

The programme is designed to develop core research and transferable skills and to enhance the employability of the student within an academic and research context but also outside of this context.

Please note: This specification provides a concise summary of the main features of the programme and the learning outcomes that a typical student might reasonably be expected to achieve and demonstrate if s/he takes full advantage of the learning opportunities that are provided. More detailed information on the learning outcomes, content and teaching, learning and assessment methods can be found in associated course documentation e.g. course handbooks, module outlines and module specifications,