Research Degree (PhD and EngD) Precepts for Collaborative Programmes & Awards

1. Introduction

1.1. The College Senate has endorsed a set of precepts governing research degree procedures which draw together College regulations and QAA guidelines. Departments are checked for compliance against the precepts during their routine (precept) and periodic reviews of research degree programmes.

1.2. The following precepts are with effect from academic year 2016-17.

1.3. The College has also endorsed additional requirements with which collaborative research degree (PhD and EngD) programmes are required to comply, and these appear in **bold** font below.

2. Precept 1 – Interviewing

2.1. All prospective students must be interviewed before an offer of a place is made. Interviews may be conducted as a videoconference or teleconference if it is not possible for the candidate to visit the department. The Selection Panel must comprise at least two members of staff and will normally include the Director of Postgraduate Studies or nominee. Staff not experienced in student selection or recruitment should attend a relevant recruitment and selection workshop before participating in an interview. All staff involved in interviewing students must keep up to date with current legislation and the College’s admission policies and policies to promote equal opportunities and widening participation.

2.2. **The interview procedures for entry into joint and collaborative programmes should normally be the same as those which students applying directly to the College are subject to.**

3. Precept 2 – Offers & Admissions

3.1. Only appropriately qualified and prepared applicants should be accepted. No offers should be made unless a student can be provided with an environment which is supportive of their research achievement; this includes only appointing supervisors who have sufficient time to carry out their supervisory responsibilities satisfactorily as well as access to necessary facilities and equipment.

3.2. **The admissions procedures for entry into joint and collaborative programmes should normally be the same as those which students applying directly to the College are subject to.**
4. Precept 3 – Supervision

4.1. Inexperienced supervisors (who have not had primary responsibility for the supervision of a successful student), including inexperienced clinical supervisors and/or those acting as second supervisors, must attend the “Introduction to Supervising PhD students at Imperial” workshop (or equivalent) and comply with the requirements as laid out in the College Guidance Note 'Eligibility for Research Degree Supervision'.

4.2. Supervisors at the partner institution/organisation must normally have previous supervisory experience (primary responsibility for the supervision of a successful student) before taking on joint supervisory duties. However, if this is not possible, for example if the collaboration is with an industrial partner, then inexperienced supervisors must have undergone training and mentoring comparable to that expected at Imperial before taking on a joint supervisory role.

5. Precept 4 – Non-Imperial Staff who Supervise

5.1. Departments must have mechanisms to ensure those supervisors working in industry or professional practice or a Partner Research Institution are aware of all College rules, regulations and procedures relating to research degree supervision. These supervisors should also be offered the opportunity to engage in developmental and other activities relating to the support of their research students.

6. Precept 5 – Continuing Professional Development and Support for Students

6.1. All supervisors are expected to engage in continuing professional development activities. All supervisors should be aware of their responsibilities.

7. Precept 6 – Supervisor Arrangements

7.1. All students must have a supervisor who is identified as the main single point of contact and it must be made clear to the student who is their alternative contact if that individual is unavailable. The main supervisor must ensure that adequate contact with and support for their research student(s) is maintained throughout the research degree programme. Where a student has more than one supervisor, it is important that the student understands their respective roles.

7.2. All students must have appropriate supervisors at both Imperial and at the partner institution/organisation and there must always be a “lead supervisor” identified for each student studying a collaborative research degree. In most cases the lead supervisor will be an experienced member of Imperial College academic staff or, in the case of joint degrees, an experienced academic located at the institution/organisation where the student first commences study.
7.3. Supervisors at the partner institution/organisation must normally have previous supervisory experience (primary responsibility for the supervision of a successful student) before taking on joint supervisory duties.

7.4. Clear lines of communication must be established and agreed between the student and supervisors at both locations.

7.5. Supervisors must maintain frequent (normally every 2 weeks) contact with students throughout the programme of study, whilst at Imperial and at the partner institution/organisation. The pattern and method of maintaining good communication must be agreed by students and their supervisors, and confirmed with the Academic Lead at the time of submitting the Research Plan Confirmation. Provision must be made for supervisors to visit the student while he/she is away from their respective institution.

8. Precept 7 – Induction

8.1. Each department must have an induction day/programme for new students and must make provision for late arrivals, either in the form of a second induction day/programme or through arrangements whereby students meet individually with key staff to complete the induction programme. Students should be made aware of their responsibilities and entitlements (including financial) at early and/or appropriate stage in their research degree programme.

8.2. The induction programme for new students on collaborative programmes should include the procedures and requirements for their particular programme, including the timelines for completion of the various stages of the research degree and the professional skills development and English language requirements, and details of the relevant members of staff involved, both at Imperial and the partner institution.

9. Precept 8 – Student Handbooks

9.1. Each department must have a postgraduate student handbook, either in hard or electronic copy which contains, but is not limited to, information listed in the College’s guidelines for handbooks document.

9.2. Students on joint and collaborative programmes must receive the postgraduate student handbook of the departments in which they are based at Imperial and at the partner institution/organisation. Students must also receive supplementary information, agreed by both partners, which describes the specific arrangements of the joint/collaborative programme.
10. **Precept 9 – Cohort Building**

10.1. Departments must make provision to allow research students to interact with their peers and should facilitate the existence of a collegial/scholarly community.

10.2. **Each joint/collaborative programme must facilitate cohort building activities and events.**

11. **Precept 10 – Research and Professional Skills Development**

11.1. All students must be made aware of the Graduate School’s [Professional Skills Statement of Policy and Attendance Requirement](#) during their induction. All students should be supported in completing this requirement. Furthermore, all students should have the opportunity to engage in further activities and training to enhance their research and professional skills and receive careers advice.

11.2. **Students on joint and collaborative programmes must complete the Graduate School's Professional Skills Development requirement, unless an alternative approach is agreed by the Postgraduate Professional Development Committee.**

12. **Precept 11 – Management/Organisation**

12.1. Each department must have a Postgraduate Committee (with a minimum composition of 3 members including the Director of Postgraduate Studies and Postgraduate Tutor) chaired usually by the Director of Postgraduate Studies, to oversee the format and quality of the higher degree programme including recruitment, admissions, induction, registration, progression, assessment, student feedback, complaints, training, proposal of external examiners, submission and completion rates. The Committee must report to the Head of Department and meet regularly. There should be a written record kept of all meetings which is accessible to the staff and study body.

12.2. **Each joint/collaborative programme must have a Joint Management Committee (EngD Boards, Joint PhD Academic Boards etc.) which meets at least annually to review procedures, student progress, good practice etc.**

13. **Precept 12 – Assessment/Appeals and Complaints**

13.1. Assessment procedures and the mechanisms for complaints and appeals should be clearly communicated to research students, supervisors and examiners. Students and supervisors should have a clear and mutually understood mechanism to raise concerns at a departmental level.

13.2. **All students on joint and collaborative programmes are subject to the same assessment procedures as programmes based solely at the College unless an alternative approach is agreed by the Postgraduate Research Quality Committee and/or Senate, as appropriate.**
13.3. **Departments at the partner institution/organisation must have a suitable protocol which should include directions to staff and students about the appropriate channels for raising particular concerns, complaints and appeals.** There must also be appropriate disciplinary procedures in place. Students on joint and collaborative programmes, including those programmes with industrial partners, must be made aware of the protocol at both institutions. It must also be made clear to the students which procedures they should follow and when.

14. **Precept 13 – Early Stage Assessment**

14.1. Assessment of students' research ability to determine whether registration for the PhD degree can continue will involve a confirmation examination held in the 9th month (18 months for part-time students) after the date of initial registration. This is to be assessed by at least one independent assessor but normally two. Assessors can only be selected by the Director of Postgraduate Studies, Postgraduate Tutor or Postgraduate Committee, who can choose to ask for suggestions from the supervisor. Where a student fails the confirmation examination, written feedback should be provided to the student (with a copy to Registry) within one month of the examination date. Students who have been asked to re-submit must do so by 11 months of initial registration. Any decision* to transfer to the MPhil degree must be made within one year of the date of registration.

* A student can also be required to withdraw from the College.

14.2. **All students on joint and collaborative programmes are subject to the same assessment procedures as programmes based solely at the College unless an alternative approach is agreed by the Postgraduate Research Quality Committee (PRQC) and/or Senate, as appropriate.**

15. **Precept 14 – Late Stage Review**

15.1. A further review of a student's research ability will be undertaken between 18 and 24 months (between 30 and 36 months for part-time students) after the date of initial registration. The form of review will be determined by the student's department and must be clearly communicated to students. Where a student fails to satisfy the assessors at this stage, written feedback should be provided within one month of the review date. Students who have been asked to re-submit* should do so within 3 months of their initial Late Stage Review.

* A student can also be required to withdraw from the College.

15.2. **All students on joint and collaborative programmes are subject to the same assessment procedures as programmes based solely at the College unless an alternative approach is agreed by the Postgraduate Research Quality Committee and/or Senate, as appropriate.**
16. Precept 15 – Writing Up Stage

16.1. All students who have not submitted their thesis within their 36 month registration period (or equivalent) will be subject to a monitoring point at 36 months to ensure that they have a realistic plan for submitting the thesis within 48 months (or equivalent) of their start date. By 36 months, students should submit a timetable of remaining work to be done in order to complete the thesis within the required time. A key outcome of the monitoring point at 36 months is to confirm whether the student will enter the completing research period or whether they will be writing up away from College.*

* A student who still has experimental work to perform at this stage cannot move into the completing research period and will continue to pay full fees.

16.2. All students on joint and collaborative programmes are subject to the same assessment procedures as programmes based solely at the College unless an alternative approach is agreed by the Postgraduate Research Quality Committee and/or Senate, as appropriate.

17. Precept 16 – Student Representation

17.1. Each department should have a staff/student committee in which postgraduate research students are represented to discuss postgraduate issues. This can be the Postgraduate Committee [Precept 11] or a separate forum. A meeting including student representatives should normally take place at least three times per year. There should be a written record kept of all meetings and this should be made accessible to students and staff.

17.2. Suitable mechanisms must exist at both partner institutions/organisations for obtaining feedback on the programme from supervisors and from students at appropriate intervals during the programme. Academic partner institutions/organisations must offer students on joint and collaborative programmes the opportunity for representation on postgraduate academic forums whenever possible.

18. Precept 17 – Evaluation

18.1. Regular evaluation of the department’s research programme(s) should be carried out internally. All stakeholders should have the opportunity to provide their feedback (and in confidence if appropriate). Evaluations should be considered openly and the results communicated appropriately with any decisions made by the department to implement (or not) any changes resulting from this feedback communicated clearly to all stakeholders.

18.2. Joint and collaborative programmes are subject to the same review and evaluation mechanisms as programmes based solely at the College.

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