Research Degree Precepts  
(with effect from AY 2017-18)

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 2017-18.

1.3. Departments involved in collaborative research degree programmes should also refer to the [Research Degree Precepts for Collaborative Programme and Awards](#).

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.

3. **Precept 2 – Offers/Admission**

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.

4. **Precept 3 – Supervision**

4.1. New and/or inexperienced supervisors (e.g. individuals who have not had primary responsibility for the supervision of a student through to successful completion of a PhD), including inexperienced clinical supervisors and/or those acting as second (or co-) supervisors, must attend the "Introduction to Supervising PhD students at Imperial" workshop (or equivalent). Where Departments appoint new members of academic staff who have experience of supervising PhD students at other institution(s) it is the responsibility of the Department to determine a strategy for training/support. Depending on the individual's prior experience this may either be through attendance at the full day “Introduction to Supervising PhD students at Imperial” workshop, or by
completing the online version of the training. In selecting supervisors and supervisory teams, Departments are expected to comply with the requirements set out in the College 'Policy on Research Degree Supervision'. Departments are also expected to have in place effective mechanisms to monitor the completion of mandatory supervisor training by new and/or inexperienced supervisors.

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 & Support for Students

6.1. All supervisors are expected to engage and participate in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) activities. All supervisors are expected to undertake CPD specifically related to PhD supervision which, in addition to the courses/workshops for new and/or inexperienced supervisors, involves participating in departmental “Focus on Best Practice in Supervision” workshops. These are Department-led workshops and Departments are therefore responsible for determining the cycle of participants and frequency of these workshops. Within this cycle it is expected that every supervisor will attend at least one workshop over a six year period. Similar to the mandatory training for new and/or inexperienced supervisors, Departments are expected to have in place effective mechanisms to monitor the engagement of supervisors in CPD activities. Departments and supervisors themselves are responsible for ensuring that they are fully aware of their role and responsibilities as a supervisor, as described in the College document Roles & Responsibilities: Research Degree Supervisor (main).

7. Precept 6 – Supervisory 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.

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.

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.

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.


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.

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.
13. **Precept 12 – Assessments/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.

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.

[Early Stage Assessment - Guidance notes](#)

[Early Stage Assessment Form](#)

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.

[Late Stage Review - Guidance notes](#)

[Late Stage Review Form](#)

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.

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.

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.

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