WHITE PAPER

Topic-Specific Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines

FOR CONSULTATION

STATUTORY GUIDELINES FOR THE QA OF RESEARCH DEGREE PROGRAMMES

VERSION 2

This White Paper contains proposed policy for topic-specific quality assurance guidelines for research degree programmes.

QQI is seeking feedback from stakeholders on the proposed policy contained in the second version of this White Paper. Different formats will be used to seek consultation in addition to emailed submissions.

Submissions may be emailed to

consultation@QQI.ie

The closing date for submissions is **Monday 20 February 2017.**

In your submission please clearly indicate:

1. *Your contact details.*
2. *Whether you are responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation.*
3. *If you do not wish your submission to be published.*

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SECTION 1 INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

This document outlines quality assurance (QA) guidelines established by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) for all providers of research degrees and related services. These guidelines are "statutory" guidelines: QQI must publish QA guidelines under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act, 2012 (referred to as the 2012 Act in this document). The 2012 Act further requires providers to "have regard to" QQI's quality assurance (QA) guidelines when establishing their own quality assurance procedures.

These guidelines supplement the QQI *Core Statutory QA Guidelines* published in April 2016. While the *Core Guidelines* provide the general quality assurance guidance required, the guidelines in this document address the specific responsibilities of providers regarding the quality assurance of research degree programmes. These responsibilities are set out in general terms in the 2012 Act. Providers of research degree programmes should also refer to QQI's other sector-specific and topic-specific quality assurance guidelines as appropriate.

These Guidelines should be read in conjunction with QQI's policy on QA Guidelines.

These topic-specific QA guidelines supplement and are in addition to the core QA guidelines.

TO WHOM DO THESE GUIDELINES APPLY?

These guidelines are applicable to all types of providers providing research degrees at levels 9 and 10 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). They are produced for the attention of, and use by, providers establishing quality assurance procedures under the 2012 Act. The legal context varies between providers as follows:

» Previously established universities and the National University of Ireland (NUI) are recognised as autonomous and must have regard to QA guidelines in the development of their internal QA procedures.

» Other awarding bodies, namely the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI), the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) and institutes of technology, must have regard to the QA guidelines prior to the approval of their QA procedures by QQI.

» Independent or private providers providing research degrees that come voluntarily to QQI to seek approval of their QA procedures and access to QQI research awards. Such providers must have regard to the QA guidelines prior to the approval of their QA procedures by QQI.

» Linked providers must have regard to these QA guidelines prior to the approval of their QA procedures by a designated awarding body.

Providers concerned with the administration and delivery of other research-intensive degree programmes with significant taught elements are advised to consider these Guidelines and apply them insofar as relevant.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THESE GUIDELINES?

These Guidelines are to be used:

» By providers when designing, and reviewing, institutional quality assurance policies and procedures for research degree programmes.

» As a basis for the approval by QQI of a provider's relevant quality assurance procedures (other than for previously established universities).

These Guidelines are not intended:

To prescribe how providers are to operate research degree programmes or how they establish their internal procedures. Rather, providers are expected to have internal systems of quality assurance for research degree programmes and related services which are appropriate to their individual contexts and include mechanisms that successfully monitor the effectiveness of those systems.

By providing a common standard these guidelines are devised to promote and enhance an active and supportive academic research environment and community in all providers offering research degrees.

SCOPE AND RELEVANCE

These guidelines refer directly to the quality assurance of research degree programmes and, related services and the associated awards of Master's Degree (by Research) and Doctoral Degrees.

SECTION 2 THE GUIDELINES

1   GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY

1.1   *Governance*

In the context of these guidelines, 'governance' refers to procedures in place to oversee all aspects of the provision of research degree programmes. Such procedures:

» are clearly described by means that are publicly and easily accessible

» involve representatives of those most closely involved, including research supervisors, research students and other research active staff intrinsic to the research environment and community

» involve objective competent persons (at least 2) in important decisions on research project approval, on student admission progress and assessment, and on risk assessment and risk mitigation associated with the context of research studies.

» involve formal approval processes for all initial research proposals by the Academic Council/ Committee; Doctoral School or Faculty Research Committee or other formal body or process

» take cognisance of evolving requirements related to ethics, research integrity, scientific reproducibility, commercial and legal sensitivities and matters that impact on research projects following their conclusion such as intellectual property.

» apply across the institution where such procedures will add to the consistency of quality of research degrees while respecting the integrity of disciplines

» take cognisance of any potential conflicting requirements between those of external stakeholders and funding bodies and internal provider procedures

» have regard to the sustainability of research programmes within fields of learning

This system of governance, may involve a specified senior officer (such as a head /dean of graduate studies) and a range of administrative structures (e.g. graduate research school or a postgraduate studies office).

QA procedures for governance have provision for circumstances where providers choose to act in cooperation with one or more other competent providers of research, to ensure adequate governance, comprehensive up-to-date policies and procedures, objective and informed decision-making, and necessary services and supports for administrators, supervisors and research students. The guidelines on governance set out in the Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines, also apply to the governance of research degrees and related services.

1.2 Resources and provisions

QA procedures for research provision for all research students include:

» supervision by a researcher/s, qualified at least at the level of the award, with demonstrated ability to make original contributions to the relevant field

» access to human, physical, academic, information, training and financial resources to sustainably support their research degree project, and facilitate it being undertaken in accord with high ethical and professional standards

» access to expert advice on legal and commercial matters as appropriate such as intellectual property

1.3 Quality assurance, enhancement and improvement

The monitoring and improvement of the quality of research provision is recognised by the provider as a priority. A core priority of the monitoring procedures in place involves monitoring across the institution as

a whole (Cross-institutional monitoring). The quality assurance system for research degree programmes in the provider is coherent, integrated into the wider internal QA system with an overall institutional structure and approach to the quality assurance of research degrees. The system is an integral part of institutional research culture. The quality assurance procedures for research degree programmes:

» enable those elements of the mission and objectives of the provider related to research degree programmes to be achieved

» include academic and research integrity, and acceptable academic standards and effective processes

» consider risks that arise in the context of research provision. Procedures are developed to mitigate against the range of risks identified and that may arise in the context of the research project. Such risks may be varied and include, fraud, malpractice and plagiarism; difficulties with funding of projects; issues with inadequate supervision; a disconnect with research partners or a breakdown of working relationships; complications with employment related research projects; student and staff wellbeing.

Procedures are in place that allow all those concerned with research degree programmes to make themselves fully aware of the relevant quality assurance procedures and integrated documentation, reflecting a comprehensive record of all QA procedures for research degrees and related services. Procedures are availability and accessible to all concerned.

For quality improvement, enhancement and evaluation purposes, due consideration is given to all feedback and self-monitoring processes, relevant data and statistics, and the findings of internally and externally initiated evaluations for research degree programmes and related services.

The procedures provide for opportunities for research students and graduates to give feedback on their experience and evaluate the effectiveness of the supporting procedures.

2   CONTINUOUS QUALITY MONITORING

Regular, systemic monitoring and evaluations of research programmes are carried out across the institution.

2.1   Ownership

Procedures in place identify the ownership of quality monitoring of research degree programmes at both provider management level, and at discipline level.

2.2   Data

Data collection related to research degree programmes and decisions on what is recorded, how and by whom, are managed at a high level within the provider. Systems are in place to capture and maintain quantitative data on research degree programmes. Access to relevant basic numbers and statistics is available for relevant stakeholders.

2.3   Linkage of data to quality improvement

Procedures for the use of data, statistics, records and outcomes of reviews relating to research degree programmes is supported by management and established as essential to effective governance and good decision-making, risk assessment and continuous quality improvement.

2.4   Tracking Individual students

Research student information systems facilitate the tracking of individual students through all stages of registration, transfer, monitoring and examination and assessment. Their participation in formalised training is monitored and any sanctions in place for non-attendance are known in advance to students.

Reliable and robust procedures are in place for the systematic monitoring and tracking of the progress of research students with a view to identifying, for example, any issues relating to satisfactory supervisory arrangements or facilities or difficulties relating to students working remotely from the main campus or overseas.

Records of all supervisor and examiner appointments are available to officers making decisions on specific supervisor and examiner nominations or confirmations.

2.5   Monitoring of Trends and Issues

Procedures are in place across the provider for

» monitoring the consistency of eligibility requirements applied across the institution including procedures for the recognition of accredited and non-accredited prior learning

» systematic monitoring of provider level trends in the progress of research students, including completion rates and times to progress through key stages of the research degree

» the recording and periodic analysis of all supervisor and examiner appointments, including the frequency of appointment

» monitoring the careers of research graduates, for so long as this is feasible

Feedback from enrolled students, graduates and non-completing students is sought and recorded. This feedback is supplemented with feedback from industry collaborators, employers, funding agencies, project sponsors, internal and external examiners and other supporting/administering staff and core national and international partners and collaborators.

While respecting confidentiality and anonymity, procedures are in place to record information on substantive matters raised by research students and others, with the objective of identifying and addressing ongoing recurring issues arising from supervision, examination, facilities, research practices or processes.

2.6   Monitoring assessment

The monitoring arrangements in place for research degree assessment are robust, formal and applied consistently across the provider for all research degrees.

Regular reviews of the effectiveness of assessment procedures, involving research students and graduates, are undertaken by the provider, including:

» benchmarking with those used in other research providers and

» periodic reviews of research theses in each broad discipline/research area with the objectives of evaluating the ongoing quality of research theses and ensuring continuous high standards.

2.7   Managing and Monitoring Partnership and Collaborations

Procedures for ongoing monitoring and review are core features for all collaborative and partnership arrangements for research programmes and related services. This is in the context of joint awarding relationships; work placements; off-campus delivery; transnational provision; employer partnerships and other scholarly institutions. Any of these partnerships may be national or international.

2.8   Periodic review

Procedures are in place to carry out reviews of research degree programmes at intervals not exceeding five years. Review teams include international and national experts, representatives of employers and recent research graduates. The provider is open to, external evaluations that cover its research degree programmes. The outcomes of institutional monitoring and review areas are considered at the level of institutional governance. Decisions on appropriate responses and actions are timely and are followed up.

3   MANAGING PARTNERSHIPS IN RESEARCH DEGREE ROGRAMMES

Where a research degree is pursued in the context of collaboration, partnership or sponsorship:

» The provider has access to expert advice on legal and commercial matters relating to national and international partners in other jurisdictions.

» Provider processes in place for entering into such partnerships include standard and explicit due diligence activities as indicated in Section 10.2 of the *Core Statutory QA Guidelines*.

» There are clear written agreements underpinning the arrangement

» Written agreements are established in advance of any research student commencing their studies and allow for monitoring and review of the effectiveness of the arrangements and procedures in place.

» The provider ensures the legality and recognition of a collaborative award and has access to the expert opinion and information this necessitates.

» There is information in place for students where providers are making a joint or other collaborative research award. Such information is in place prior to the commencement of the research degree and communicated in advance to the students as appropriate.

» That the standards, training requirements and norms for research degree programmes are applicable, and include formal assurances on students' welfare and wellbeing in all settings in which they will be based.

» That external supervisors, and the research environments in which they work, are in accord with high ethical, continuous professional and safety standards including norms on training requirements. Arrangements are in place for continuous improvement.

» Effective provisions are in place, where research students pursue their projects on the campus or premises of partner organisations, for training, resources, supports and access to norms of the broader intellectual research community e.g. Experience as tutors or demonstrators

» The provider ensures arrangements are in place with partners for regular, effective communication, conducive to successful completion of the research project in line with good research practice.

» Effective provisions are in place that apply in circumstances where funded research students are also employees of a partner organisation. Such procedures are clear and facilitate agreement on boundaries, for example on learner/employee status in respect of disciplinary and grievance procedures, performance evaluation, ethics approvals, and conflict of interest matters.

4   RESEARCH STUDENTS

4.1   Project identification and recruitment

Appropriate, adequate and up-to-date information is available to help students make informed choices when considering options which relate to their research degree, project topic, supervisors and financial plans. Procedures are in place to establish and publish this information.

The information emphasises fundamentally important options and aspects of each research route and programme in terms of what areas of research are offered (including links to specific academic teams, units), what research students can expect from the programme, emphasising the demanding learning objectives and specific programme requirements; general student responsibilities, for example, on programme costs, likely time commitment, obligations around group ownership/co-authorship of a project; intellectual property and related areas. Information on the unique nature of research degrees, for example, how student-supervisor-project combinations may be formed or developed and other relevant institutional requirements. This includes information on institutional supports such as availability around English language teaching supports.

4.2   Registration

Beyond procedures covering general student registration (as set out in the Core statutory QA Guidelines), procedures are in place for registration on research degree programmes. Procedures include clear admission criteria for each relevant research programme. All procedures are compatible with the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

Expertise is in place to assess qualifications presented from domestic and international students as evidence of meeting admission criteria. Decisions to admit to the register take into account availability of expert supervision and all other necessary resources.

Procedures for registration as full-time or part-time students reflects engagement with study, and that the provider does not place demands on students which interfere significantly with their ability to pursue their research project in a timely manner.

4.3   Progression and transfer

There are procedures and criteria related to student progression and transfer. These include:

» Procedures for systematic formal assessment of progress which involve supervisory teams; enhance objectivity and/or competence through the involvement of independent experts; and allow for extra assessment if requested by supervisors or students.

» Procedures setting out that final decisions related to student progression are made by appropriate bodies in the institution in accord with the regulations of the provider.

» Protocols for student transfer from another institution where research has already commenced.

» Formal processes to manage the progression of students to a higher research degree register, which involve independent expert review and defined criteria.

» Procedures to deal with matters that impact on the duration of the students' project, including:

  ~ arrangements for maternity, paternity and adoptive and parental leave

  ~ Students transferring from part-time to full-time study or vice versa

  ~ arrangements for suspension of study.

» Procedures for transfer between and exit from research degree programmes

» Adequate opportunities for all relevant students to become aware of these

» Procedures to record all such decisions and retain relevant documents

Procedures are in place to allow decisions on progression and transfer to be reviewed or appealed. This procedure involves appropriate objective expertise and allows for decisions to change arrangements with respect to supervision.

4.4 Responsibilities of research students

Procedures are in place to make research students aware of their responsibilities, for example with respect to commitment, integrity, ethics, attendance, engagement with supervisors and developmental opportunities, reporting on the progress of their research projects and the requirements for attaining the overall standards necessary to graduate.

4.5 Student opportunity to raise issues

Procedures are in place to facilitate research students raising issues related to their research programme or related services, and to make complaints, including matters such as allegations of academic dishonesty, discrimination and harassment.

Supports are in place to allow research students to avail of confidential independent and objective advice in respect of these procedures. Such supports involve trained and suitably experienced individuals and anticipate a range of possibilities for access to such supports.

Procedures are in place to capture relevant information related to formal student complaints. Complaints are logged and reported for quality improvement purposes and trends are addressed. Such procedures preserve student anonymity and confidentiality.

Procedures are in place to implement follow-up actions required where complaints are upheld. Such procedures include matters regarding the certification[1] of qualifications and clarify the procedures and criteria for the withdrawal of an award and the standing of the award documentation and other matters relating to research outputs.

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1   QA Guidelines for Certification are set out in the Sector Specific QA Guidelines for Designated Awarding Bodies (section 6.1) and Sector Specific QA Guidelines for Institutes of Technology (section 6.1).

5   SUPERVISORS AND PROJECTS

5.1 Supervision

Procedures in place for the supervision of research degree students:

» Clearly define the composition of a supervisory team, the required qualification, experience and training, in addition to the roles and responsibilities of each member

» ensure that students receive effective supervision of their research and have a principal supervisor who is normally a member of staff and takes full responsibility for the overall management of the student and an appropriate level of responsibility for supervision.

The supervision of each research student is the collective responsibility of the supervisor(s), the department/school/other appropriate research unit and the provider. Criteria and protocols for arrangements relating to co-supervision, external mentoring supervision and advisory roles are formally established

5.2   Supervisors

Procedures in place for the appointment/establishment of supervisors:

» recognise that being a supervisor is a professional role that requires both being an active researcher in the relevant area, as well as particular skills and capacities regarding supervision

» include clearly defined formal responsibilities, criteria on the eligibility of persons having specific roles in a supervisory team, and mechanisms to ensure supervisors are making themselves aware of these

Qualified research-active staff are provided with supports and structured training as research degree supervisors and, in the case of inexperienced supervisors, obliged to avail of these at the early stages of supervising. Supports and training include provider regulations governing the normal contact with students and the operation of research programmes, assessment, examinations and expectations regarding quality assurance.

Procedures allow for continuity of adequate supervision in cases such as those related to supervisors being removed from the role, being absent for significant periods or leaving the provider's employment.

Supervisors that are external to the provider have access to information and training relating to their role, responsibilities and the institutional requirements for the research degree programme.

Procedures are in place to record all ongoing staff roles as supervisors, or membership of a supervisory team.

Procedures in place recognise research supervision and membership of supervisory teams as contributions to staff workloads and have in place agreed, context- and discipline-appropriate, flexible standards and criteria as to the relative weights of the various roles.

5.3 Supervisor opportunity to raise and address issues

Procedures are in place to facilitate supervisors and other supervisory structures to:

» identify and source necessary extra support for students where required

» identify and address inappropriate or insufficient student work practice, style of research or deficiencies in writing which may require redress or a formal warning

» implement alternative courses of action which may be necessary for students, for example, to exit the programme, or transfer to another programme

» raise any issues relating to the supervision of students, on or off the campus

5.4 Research Projects

Procedures are in place to establish oversight mechanisms so that research projects agreed with students are realistic and appropriate with respect to:

» the level of the degree programme

» the experience and competences of the principal (and other) supervisor[s]

» the qualifications and capabilities of the research student

» facilities, resources and training available within the provider and, if any, in (the) cooperating external organisation(s)

» measures planned to deal with any limitations with respect to facilities, resources and training otherwise available

» compliance with the ethical and safety requirements of the provider

Procedures refer to scientific rigour and how it is adhered to. Scientific rigour will ensure robust and unbiased experimental design, methodology, analysis, interpretation and reporting of results. This includes full transparency in reporting experimental details so that others may reproduce and extend the findings.

5.5   *Physical facilities for research*

Procedures for physical facilities for research programmes refer to specifications for the programme's resource requirements (required as part of the research programme and intrinsic to it) for each research student. Such requirements are identified at an early stage. Students have access to these resources and property including, intellectual property, premises, IT resources, technical and administration support, materials, consumables and both specific and basic equipment and accommodation conducive to research (including write-up of thesis).

If aspects of the programme are supported or provided at more than one location each location independently meets the location-specific resource requirements, and procedures are in place for use of external off-site resources in the context of partner collaborations.

6 TRAINING AND CAREER PREPARATION

6.1 Individual development plans

Individual development plans (e.g. personal development plans) are established for each research student. They are jointly developed and agreed by the research student and his/her supervisor(s) soon after induction. The process for establishing the development plan facilitates full ownership by the student of the plan. Each plan is revised as necessary during the duration of the programme.

6.2 Skills Training

Fit-for purpose training in research, generic and discipline-specific skills is provided for research students to equip them to advance their research projects and for future employment including:

» Specific sessions and sources of information for research students on plagiarism, citation standards and other related areas

» Courses and activities to suit the discipline area(s) of the research project and those which relate more directly to the graduate attributes are available with appropriate frequency to facilitate take-up at relevant stages.

» Clear information on training opportunities is available to students and supervisors.

» Robust quality assurance measures are in place in respect of training provided.

» Formal arrangements for cooperation among institutions/providers to share and/or facilitate access to training resources.

6.3 Research Mobility: Conferences and networking

Procedures for facilitating research mobility and networking include:

» Maximise opportunities for research students to experience different research environments, that are beneficial for accessing relevant information or acquiring specific skills.

» Opportunities for research students to report on work in progress and to present findings, both internally and externally, for example, by means of oral and poster presentations at seminars, workshops and conferences and in journal articles.

» Facilitate students making contacts and 'networking', as appropriate, with others, nationally and internationally, who are active in similar fields of research.

» Facilitate work placement/internships where applicable.

6.4   *Career preparation*

The provider, its careers service and individual supervisors seek to make research students aware of further educational opportunities, realistic career options and long-term career development. Options with respect to future careers are relevant topics for discussion during induction, the planning of each student's individual development plan and, as appropriate, during monitoring and assessment sessions.

7   ASSESSMENT

7.1   *Procedures and national criteria for final assessment of research degrees*

Guidelines on assessment are set out in the Core Statutory QA Guidelines. The procedures below are additional procedures for the assessment of research degrees.

Procedures for the assessment of research degrees are consistent with the NFQ award type descriptors for research degrees – award type descriptor 'M' for the Masters degree; and award type descriptor 'O' for Doctoral Degrees.

7.2   Elements of Assessment

Procedures for assessment for research degrees include clarification of research output, most often a thesis, *(here meaning a coherent body of detailed written work on a specific topic particular to the student)* but may also be a written submission with a selection of papers, performance practice or research artefact and, in some cases, performance in a viva voce (oral examination). Processes for submitting the research output are clearly outlined. Assessment for doctoral degrees always includes a viva voce. Other circumstances in which a viva voce is required, available on request, or not facilitated are clearly outlined.

Procedures are clear with regard to the impact on the overall result of the thesis evaluation and the performance of the candidate at the *viva voce* where applicable.

7.2.1 Research Theses and Contribution

Procedures are clear on the variety of formats of capturing research contribution available to students, consistent with international norms in disciplines in which programmes are offered.

Specific contexts are identified in which formats other than a monograph may be appropriate. All formats allowed facilitate assessment against an equivalent standard.

Clear guidelines are made available to students, supervisors, examiners and members of an examination board on each format, including considerations to be taken into account in choosing it, at what stage a student can indicate the intended format, who can approve the format, standards, length and presentation and conventions and protocols for student vetting of their draft thesis using appropriate software.

Procedures are in place which require acknowledgment of the specific contributions of others, if any, to the research project.

Procedures are in place for the arrangements for, accessing, disclosure, dissemination and archiving of the thesis, subsequent to award.

7.2.2 *Viva Voce*

Clear procedures are in place for the conduct of oral examinations which outline

» who is responsible for arranging and communicating the date and location of the exam

» what mode of engagement is permitted

» expected duration,

» acceptable locations,

» who may be present, and who (if anybody aside from the student and examiners and independent chairperson) may contribute, and under what circumstances.

» the circumstances, if any, in which the examination may be conducted with an examiner at a location remote to the student, and the conditions relating to how this is done.

7.3   *Assessment Boards and Examiners*

Procedures relating to assessment/examination boards for research degrees indicate:

» who comprises the assessment board (internal (if any) and external examiners; independent chair; others), and the circumstances where additional members may be required (e.g. circumstances that require the appointment of a second external examiner or other additional examiners)

» the role and responsibilities of each of the board members in the context of all elements of the examination including circumstances where the opinions of external examiners are given particular weight in final assessment decisions and recommendations

» the arrangements and conditions for formal nomination and appointment of the board members including:

~ qualifications required (e.g. normally qualified to at least the equivalent NFQ level of the award sought by the research student); experience required, and defining what type of research activity (standard, degree of relevance, and how recent) is required.

~ those excluded from involvement in the assessment; defining what is considered to represent a conflict of interest, restrictions on repeat appointments or clusters of appointments from specific schools, departments, research units; what constitutes appropriate independence from the student, project and/or institution.

~ the criterion for being considered 'external' or 'internal' (with external generally understood and accepted as independent and external to the provider)

~ what qualifications experience is required for those members of the board that are not involved in the examination of the student (e.g. independent chair)

» where records of external examiners appointed for research degrees, for each broad academic/ discipline area can be consulted, when new appointments are being considered.

» how candidates are informed of possible examination board members in advance of their appointment, and afforded an opportunity to raise concerns known to them regarding a proposed nominee.

» a robust mechanism for ensuring appointments of examiners are in line with the stated conditions and requirements and reviewing the effectiveness of the procedures for appointments and outcomes required.

7.4 Assessment outcomes and revisions

Procedures for assessment outcomes are clear and notified in advance:

» All potential outcomes to research degree assessment and examinations are clearly worded and communicated to all involved. Outcomes which require a full re-examination are distinct from those which require specific revisions to a thesis, but no re-examination

» The consequences for students of non-completion of required changes, or failure to resubmit are stated and made known in advance

» Assessment boards communicate clear and succinct rationales to candidates for the outcome of their examination and, in cases where revisions are stipulated, candidates are given specific details as to what is required of them

» The provider defines the minimum basic characteristics for the reports that examiners prepare for the provider's examinations board

» The process and timeline to verify completion of required corrections and amendments to theses is clear

» The process and timelines for re-examinations is clearly defined

» Arrangements are in place to deal with situations where research degree students do not carry out satisfactorily, or within a reasonable time, specified changes/resubmission of a thesis

» The provider establishes processes to deal with cases of examiner disagreement

» Final decisions related to the outcomes of research degree assessments, and where appropriate decisions that a student may progress to graduation, are made by appropriate bodies in the provider in accord with the regulations of the provider

» That matters regarding the certification[2] of qualifications and criteria for the withdrawal of an award, including the standing of the award documentation and other matters relating to research outputs are in place

7.5   Appeals

The provider has a defined appeal mechanism that is available to any research degree candidate who wishes to appeal the decision of his/her assessment board. The description of this mechanism is clear, comprehensive and is readily and openly available to students and staff.

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2   QA Guidelines for Certification are set out in the Sector Specific QA Guidelines for Designated Awarding Bodies (section 6.1) and Sector Specific QA Guidelines for Institutes of Technology (section 6.1).