

Recognition of Professional Doctorates

1 Introduction

Professional doctorate programmes emerged in the UK in the early 1990s, since which time there has been a considerable growth in the number and range of programmes. The first professional doctorates in the UK in the social sciences were in the fields of business and management (DBA), education (EdD) and psychology (DClinPsy or DEdPsy), since when this form of doctorate has been developed in an increasing number of professional fields and by a growing number of universities. The ESRC welcomes the opportunity to include these programmes within the *Training Guidelines*, since professional doctorates provide a clear means for practitioners to develop and apply academic and professional knowledge and to develop their professional practice. It is recognised that as the majority of students undertaking professional doctorates are experienced and practising professionals, most students will study for the degree part-time.

The sections that follow cover the following:

- the purposes of this section of the *Guidelines* in the context of the ESRC's policies and procedures
- a discussion on the general nature of professional doctorates
- research training requirements
- key issues in the provision of professional doctorates

2 The purposes of the Guidelines in relation to Professional Doctorates

The enormous expansion of the number and type of professional doctorates within the social sciences has led to certain variability of standards and expectations in many aspects of the programmes. The ESRC considers that the professional doctorate (PD) is an exciting innovation within the field of doctoral study and recognises that it is important to seek to achieve parity between the PD and the PhD, whilst seeking to encourage innovation and support the diversity of forms of this emerging qualification. Since a distinguishing feature of the doctorate is the successful undertaking of an original piece of research, and therefore a grasp of research methods, the ESRC considers that PDs should include a certain level of research training leading to a minimum level of research competence. These guidelines therefore aim to provide a general framework to indicate how the training requirements for students undertaking professional doctorates relate to the training requirements set out in the main body of the *Postgraduate Training Guidelines*. Professional doctorates aim to develop an individual's professional practice and to support them in producing a contribution to (professional) knowledge. It is therefore important for those seeking recognition to indicate how professional knowledge is infused within and throughout the programme. The ESRC wishes to provide a framework or standard which will serve as a 'kitemark' of quality for those universities gaining recognition for their professional doctorates. It is hoped that this kitemark will serve to develop both the quality and the innovativeness of this form of research degree, and will stimulate the development of new forms of professionally oriented research

training and research methods. Whilst the ESRC will recognise professional doctorates in order to assure quality and level of training provided, it has decided not to fund students who choose this route at this stage.

3 The general nature of Professional Doctorates

Professional doctorates normally include significant elements of directed study which are subject to formal assessment. These components frequently include both the teaching of research methods, and also components related to broadening or deepening the students' understanding of the disciplines in which they are researching or providing them with appropriate transferable skills. One feature that the ESRC considers will be common to all PDs is a requirement that students submit an independent piece of research in the form of a dissertation or thesis and that this research is required to be examined by an acknowledged expert in their field of research. It is within this context that the ESRC sees the focus of a professional doctorate as a dual one – to make a contribution to both theory and practice, and to develop professional practice through making a contribution to (professional) knowledge. To achieve this the research conducted would be expected normally to involve 'real life' issues concerned with practice, often within the student's own organisation, and there would also be an expectation that students' close interaction with professionally related problems through the process of their research would lead to opportunities for personal and professional development. The measure of this development would be expected to form part of the assessment for the doctoral award. The ESRC recognises that the professional contextualisation may take different forms, depending on the profession and may range across a variety of aspects of a student's doctoral development, from differences in supervisory arrangements, to the nature and form of the curriculum, and assessment arrangements.

4 Research training requirements

The ESRC considers that research training is important for all doctoral students (i.e. those studying for PhDs and for PDs) and that for students to be appropriately prepared to carry out research and produce a doctoral level dissertation they require to be exposed to a range of research training similar to that set out in the *Postgraduate Training Guidelines*. In addition a key feature of professional doctorates will be the development of knowledge and skills which enable them make a contribution to professional practice.

1) Research Training

- a) The minimum requirements for research training in professional doctorates should include a range of methodological approaches. Institutions will therefore need to indicate the nature, content and amount of formal training provision in research methods throughout the period of study. This includes access to specialist/advanced research methods and discipline knowledge as the studies progress.
- b) The adequacy of arrangements for the supervision of students. This includes the level of supervision and the training and monitoring of supervisors in place in the institution.
- c) The presence of an active research environment from which participants can benefit from interaction with experienced researchers and from where students are encouraged to participate in research activities that develop their thinking and skills of critical awareness.

- d) A critical mass of students so that students can benefit from an interaction with peers through such activities as seminars, training events and the sharing of common facilities.
- e) Satisfactory submission rates and procedures in place to monitor the progress of students.

With respect to research methods, training programmes would be expected to include how students, who may complete broadly-based professional master's programmes, are prepared for research and helped to develop a critical understanding of the disciplines and methods upon which they will be drawing. They will need to have an understanding of:

- the philosophy of research, including alternative epistemological positions to provide a context for theory construction;
- research design, including the choice of alternative techniques, the formulation of researchable questions and appropriate alternative approaches to research;
- methods of data collection and analysis, including quantitative and qualitative methods and appropriate skills;
- specialist/advanced methods relevant to the individual's own research.

2) **Contribution to Professional Practice**

With respect to the personal and professional development of students, professional doctorate programmes will be expected to have addressed the following:

- a) How the research contributes to the development of the student's practice in a professional context. Example might include: involving a professional body or senior practitioner in the assessment process, or the requirement for students to produce a reflective statement which demonstrates the contribution made by the whole PD to their professional learning, or a statement describing the value students gain from any courses students are required to follow in the course of their degree and how these relate to the development of their professional understandings and knowledge.
- b) The structure of the assessment and the extent to which the different elements of assessment (including the thesis) combine both academic and professional criteria

3) **Key issues in the provision of Professional Doctorates**

- i) Does the Professional Doctorate provide a bridge between theory and practice and vice-versa?

Professional Doctorates represent a good opportunity to demonstrate the relationship of theory to practice as well as for practice to be questioned. A key issue for any programme will be the pedagogical philosophy and how the approach taken considers the link between theory and practice and vice-versa. This has implications for how participants are equipped to approach their research, particularly during the induction process and will include such considerations as:

- the nature of the thesis
- the type of research design that is appropriate for the study, e.g. action research, insider research and collaborative methods of enquiry and the use made of longitudinal designs and the case method.

There are also issues related to students being encouraged to produce outputs for both academic and practitioner audiences (both conference presentations as well as journal articles).

ii) Are there different arrangements for the supervision of students?

Given that the majority of students on Professional Doctorates will be studying part-time, those submitting for recognition are asked to show how the supervisory support systems are managed to meet the particular requirements of this group of students and how the very different constituency of part-time researchers are catered for within the institution. It is particularly important to consider such issues as:

- a) The choice of the supervisory team.
- b) The frequency of supervisory meetings.
- c) Arrangements for meetings with students that are studying at a distance.
- d) The support infrastructure during the research phase of their programme.
- e) How quality is monitored, and student feedback considered and what provisions are made for appeals.

iii) Are there different requirements for Examination and Assessment?

It may be necessary to involve in the assessment process the voice of a professional or a professional body within the viva. In addition, the student's learning and impact on practice as professionals need to be considered. For example, in some institutions students are required to provide a critically reflective statement in addition to the thesis. Those seeking recognition are also asked to indicate how any taught coursework components link to the final assessment of the student and whether or not these elements of coursework form part of the assessment within the viva.

iv) Are there particular Ethical Issues that need to be addressed?

As the majority of students will conduct their research within their own organisational setting, students may need to consider particular ethical issues related to their research that are not always apparent in a traditional PhD. These may include issues concerned with insider research and the particular challenges posed for those researching in their own organisational context.