RESEARCH DEGREES HANDBOOK

Volume I - APPLICANTS

2015/16

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INTRODUCTION

This Research Degrees Handbook is designed to be a source of reference for prospective research degree students. It also provides useful information for staff involved in the recruitment and supervision of research students. It contains important information on policies and procedures relating to research degrees in the University.

This Handbook should be read in conjunction with individual Faculty information on research degrees, and the Regulations for the Award of The University's Degrees of Master of Philosophy, Doctor of Philosophy and Doctor in an Area of Professional Practice – Version 2.

Research students are an important part of the University's research community. You will become an expert in your field, and will work closely with staff and may, with the approval of your supervisors and head of department, perform teaching or other responsibilities for undergraduate or taught masters students. Research can be a lonely occupation and requires a great deal of self-discipline, even for the most dedicated scholar. Research students are strongly encouraged to take advantage of the help offered by their supervisory team, school/department, and other departments and agencies both within and outside the University.

On behalf of the University, I wish you every success with your research studies.

Professor Julian Beer
Pro-Vice-Chancellor
Chair, Research Committee (RC)

INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH DEGREES AT BIRMINGHAM CITY UNIVERSITY

THE UNIVERSITY AND FACULTIES

Birmingham City University currently offers over one hundred postgraduate and post-experience taught courses and has almost 400 research students. Over 15% of our students are following postgraduate or post-experience programmes, and this figure is growing annually.

The University offers research degrees which can be studied part-time, full-time or by a combination of the two. In general, applicants for PhD should have a minimum of a first or second class honours degree and applicants for PhD in some areas should also have a Master's degree. However, for those who don't have the standard entry qualifications, evidence of ability and relevant background knowledge and experience, for example publications and academic references, may be taken into account.

Research students normally commence their studies at one of the three research degree intake points in the year - September, February or May. The entry points coincide with the commencement of the Postgraduate Certificate in Research Practice which all research students study in their first year as a research student (see page 6).

The University's courses are grouped into four Faculties, all of which welcome applications from potential research students.

Faculty of the Arts, Design and Media
Faculty of Business, Law and Social Sciences
Faculty of Health, Education, and Life Sciences
Faculty of Computing, Engineering and the Built Environment

Research degree students are *registered* for their research degree via the Faculty with which they are studying (please also refer to page 7 'Offer and Enrolment' for more detail of research degree registration). Each Faculty has a member of academic staff with specific responsibility for research students (normally the Associate Dean with responsibility for Research or the Faculty Director of Research / Research Degrees Co-Ordintator). The Faculties and contact details can be found at:
http://www.bcu.ac.uk/research/research-students/applying/contact-points

RESEARCH COMMUNITY

Our research community includes our research staff, research students, and collaborators and partners (or research users). Our research community works across disciplines to address key local, national and global challenges, in line with the priorities of the University and our students.

These are the academic areas in which we support our research community. These areas help to focus our research and allow for effective cross-disciplinary work.

Applied Criminology

Computer Science and Informatics

Education

Design and the Creative Industries

Environment and Society

American Legal Studies

Comparative Legal Studies

Business, Innovation and Enterprise

Applied Sociology

Fine Art

Health and Social Care

Low Carbon

Media and Cultural Studies

Music and Performance

English Studies

Applied Psychology

Institute for Digital Experience

More detail on each area of research and its focus are available on the following website:
http://www.bcu.ac.uk/research/-centres-of-excellence
or please contact the University's Director of Research: keith.osman@bcu.ac.uk

Further information on research degrees can also be found on the University's Internet site
http://www.bcu.ac.uk/research

TYPES OF RESEARCH DEGREE

The University offers two principal research degree awards:

## 1.	Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

For PhD applicants need to be able to demonstrate that the topic is capable of development into a "significant contribution to knowledge".

## 2.	Doctorate in an Area of Professional Practice.

The Faculty of Business, Law and Social Sciences offers a Doctorate in Business Administration (DBA). Further information on the DBA is available on application from the Birmingham City Business School.

The Faculty of Health, Education and Life Sciences offers a Doctorate in Education (EdD). Further information on the EdD is available on application from the School of Education.

THE POSTGRADUATE CERTIFICATE IN RESEARCH PRACTICE

All new research degree students are expected to attend and complete the Postgraduate Certificate in Research Practice during the first year of their PhD or DBA programme (or during the second year for the EdD programme). This programme provides an introduction to the skills and competences required to successfully complete higher degree research. Successful completion of this programme is required in order to progress on the PhD, and attendance is compulsory for all new research students registered and will normally be studied during the first year of enrolment and completed as a precursor to the Progression Assessment Panel carried out towards the end of Year 1.

The Postgraduate Certificate in Research Practice is specifically designed to meet the needs of all students at Birmingham City University who are embarking on a programme of research for Master of Philosophy (MPhil) or Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) and Professional Doctorates. The course lasts one semester and is intended to complement and support the traditional practice of research degree supervision, which remains central to the teaching and learning of research. The course will provide students with:

- Preparation for carrying out academic work for a research degree
- An introduction to the research skills, practices and procedures that are essential with postgraduate research study
- An opportunity to explore a range of theoretical and practical research issues and their application to particular phenomena
- A supportive environment in which to develop a specific area of research interest into a viable research proposal
- A structured programme that assists in the development of an individual research project

The course serves to develop the wider research student community at Birmingham City University and enable participants to share any concerns that they may have and mutually support one another. It is important that you attend the programme both to gain the knowledge required to carry out your research degree, but also to make contacts with researchers in other faculties.

The Postgraduate Certificate in Research Practice is delivered via the use of common sessions (involving the wider research student community) as well as faculty/subject specific sessions. More detail on the Pg Cert is available from the faculty in which you are interested in studying, or the Research Degrees Officer.

ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR LEARNING
If you and / or your proposed supervisor feel that you have already attained a qualification or experience that would preclude you from having to undertake the Pg Cert in Research Practice, then a case must be made by the faculty before the offer of a place to a research degree is made. This would involve you providing to the faculty any formal evidence of having attained a similar/equivalent qualification / experience; the faculty would then match this against the learning outcomes of the Pg Certificate in Research Practice, which would be considered formally by the Faculty Research Committee.

UNIVERSITY REGULATIONS AND POLICIES

- To access the University's **Regulations For The Award Of Master Of Philosophy And Doctor Of Philosophy,** please go to www.bcu.ac.uk/student-info and click on 'Academic Regulations and Policies' (the Research Degrees Regulations are Section G Version 2 of the Regulations).

- To access the University **Research Ethical Framework**, please see the Academic Services Sharepoint site – Research Degrees section.

- The University has a Single Equality Scheme which is applied across the institution. It is available at http://www.bcu.ac.uk/_media/docs/Single-Equality-Scheme.pdf

- To access the University's student complaints, appeals and disciplinary procedures, please go to (https://icity.bcu.ac.uk/student-services/complaints-and-appeals

ADMISSION AND ENROLMENT PROCEDURES

APPLICATIONS AND INTERVIEWS
Below is an indicative schedule for applications, admissions and enrolment for research degree students.

Target date	Intake		
	September	**February**	**May**
Final date for submission of online research degree application / receipt of research degree applications by faculties.	End May	End Oct	End January
Final date for requests to make research degree offers (via paperless admissions or Interview/Reg form & supporting documentation to Academic Registry).	End June	End Nov	End February
Final date for acceptance of offer from applicants.*	End July	End Dec	End March

* At the point of offer (using the Interview/Registration Form the faculty will indicate whether it is proposed that the student will start in the forthcoming September, February or May which will inform the offer issued by Academic Registry.

You are invited to submit an online application via the online portal which can be found by going to: http://bcu.ac.uk/courses and searching for 'postgraduate' courses in the chosen subject area.

The University welcomes enquiries from potential research students who have an identified outline research project they are interested in pursuing, but applicants who do not yet have an identified research project are also welcome to contact the University to discuss possible options. The faculty will post project briefs on their web pages to announce any projects open to application from prospective research students.   From time to time the University will advertise studentships and will invite applications to undertake specific research projects which have been defined by the University (sometimes with input from collaborating institutions).

The guidelines below show the application procedure to be followed.

1. Potential research degree applicants are welcome to contact the designated research contact point for their chosen area for an informal discussion.

2. All applicants should complete the University Application Form.

   This requires details of the applicant's academic qualifications and professional experience, as well as two references and a summary of research interests/proposal. The research proposal should provide an outline response to the project brief outline which will be provided by the faculty. Please include how your proposal relates to any previous work you have done. It should also include a proposed title, clearly formulated research aims,

details of the research methodology you intend to use and a bibliography/alphabetical list of references cited.

3. If the faculty is able to progress the application, the applicant will be invited to interview with members of the Faculty Research Committee to discuss the application in more detail and to explore research interests.

4. All applicants would be asked to provide any formal documents that may be outstanding for the purposes of an offer (such as qualifications and references). At this point, it is expected that the applicant and the faculty will discuss a mutually convenient proposed start date for the commencement of the research degree. This will be one of three intake points per year for research degrees (see table above).

5. The online application will be overseen by staff within the relevant faculty and the Research & Impact Services department. For queries on research degree application, please email: research.admissions@bcu.ac.uk

If the online admissions portal cannot be accessed, standard Research Degree Application forms are available from www.bcu.ac.uk/research/research-students/applying
(or from Faculty Research Degrees contacts).

OFFERS AND ENROLMENT

If the Faculty wishes to make you an offer of a place for a research degree, a formal letter will be issued by Academic Registry, offering a place to study on the programme, showing an intended start date and indicating the allocated Director of Studies and Second Supervisor/s. The offer will also indicate your fee status and the fee payment required at enrolment.

When you have confirmed your acceptance of the offer you will be invited, by email, to complete the required online pre-enrolment process and to attend the next appropriate enrolment session. Enrolment is the process by which the University ensures that it holds appropriate and correct information about all its students, the courses they are following and their fee payments. All students of the University are required to re-enrol annually.

All new students are asked to attend an on-campus enrolment session for their initial enrolment, where you are asked to provide the required documentation (to evidence identification/qualifications/funding etc.). Following initial enrolment, subsequent re-enrolment for UK/EU students will be online and will not require attendance on-campus. All non-EU students are required to attend an on-campus enrolment session each year with their identification documentation.

You will normally commence your studies at the research degree intake point either in September, February or May which coincides with the commencement of the Postgraduate Certificate in Research Practice. Which intake point you select should be mutually convenient for you and the faculty, and should be agreed in consultation with the faculty. Once enrolled as a student of the University you have the right to use all the normal facilities and receive a regular tutorial time. Your supervisory team provides assistance with the development and progress of the research programme and ensures that you have attended and completed the Pg Certificate in Research Practice and preparation for assessment.

REGISTRATION

Registration is the process by which the University formally approves the research project and supervisory arrangements for each research student. Registration onto the research degree is considered by the Faculty Research Committee before the point of offer and is formally confirmed at the initial enrolment onto the degree.

THE REGISTRATION PERIOD

The maximum periods of registration are as follows:

	PhD	MPhil
full-time	4 years	2 years
part-time	7 years	3 years

A full-time student is expected to reach the standard for PhD within three years of registration, with a maximum of four years permitted. A part-time student is expected to reach the standard for PhD within four years of registration, with a maximum of seven years permitted.

Where a research degree student's registration is transferred to Master of Philosophy, the maximum period of registration shall be two years from the point of transfer (if the transfer occurred in the student's first year of registration) or shall be a maximum of one year (if the transfer occurred thereafter).

FEES

A list of current fees is available at https://icity.bcu.ac.uk/research-community

Fee levels are reviewed annually. Fees are normally payable in full at enrolment, although if you are paying your own fees you may be able to pay in instalments if the fees exceed a certain amount. Further detail on the current fee payment methods is available on the Finance webpages and is also provided to each student in the emailed annual enrolment requests.

Overseas students who study by Distance Learning pay the appropriate part-time fee plus the full-time overseas fee pro-rata for the number of weeks spent at the University. The pro-rata fee is assessed on there being 48 weeks in the academic year for research students.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Details of internal and external funding opportunities available within Birmingham City University for research degree students are updated and available at the following site:

https://icity.bcu.ac.uk/Research-Community/Funding-Opportunities

and are advertised as they arise in the national press. There are comparatively few sources of financial support for research students and there is a great deal of competition for those schemes that exist.

It is, therefore, important that before embarking on your research degree you have the necessary resources to support your own studies.

The Student Services Department may be able to assist you to find appropriate charitable trusts from which funding may occasionally be available.

Research students who are in extreme financial difficulty are eligible to apply for small amounts of funding from the University's Hardship Fund (contact Student Services for details).

OVERSEAS (NON-EU) RESEARCH DEGREE STUDENTS

Birmingham City University has a significant number of students from overseas. Overseas students can study on a full-time basis at the University or on a part-time basis in their own country provided that there are sufficient facilities at home and at the University, and that the student attends the University full-time for an agreed period each year (which will be a minimum of six weeks per year). This mode of study is known as Distance Learning. Please also note that the University is not able to make an offer to study on this basis until an appropriate local supervisor in the student's home country has been identified.

All overseas applicants must have sufficient command of the English Language to satisfactorily complete the programme of work and to prepare and defend their thesis in English. International (Non-UK) students must meet the University's English Language entrance requirements, further full details of which, (and pre-sessional English courses that are available) can be found at:
http://www.bcu.ac.uk/international/discover-bcu/english-language

The minimum standard English language standard required for entry to a research degree at Birmingham City University is IELTS overall 6.5 (with no less than 6.0 in any category), or equivalent. Please note that the required minimum may be higher than this for some subjects.

General information for overseas students on studying and living in the UK can be found in the University's online guides, which can be found at http://www.bcu.ac.uk/international

This site includes information on living costs in the UK and it is important that you ensure that they have the necessary financial support to complete their chosen programme of study. Advice is also available from the International Office, telephone +44 121 331 5389 or e-mail internationaladmissions@bcu.ac.uk.

ACADEMIC TECHNOLOGY APPROVAL SCHEME (ATAS)

ATAS is a requirement of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Students applying for postgraduate study in certain sensitive subjects, knowledge of which could be used in programmes to develop weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) or their means of delivery, will need to apply for an Academic Technology Approval Scheme (ATAS) certificate before they can study in the UK.

The requirement for an ATAS certificate only applies to students from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) and Switzerland applicants should:

- find out whether they require an ATAS certificate

- read the guidance on how to apply for an ATAS certificate

The areas of postgraduate research degree study which require ATAS clearance are currently:

- Engineering   (JACS code: H100)
- Computing   (JACS code: G400)
- Health   (JACS code: B900)
- Digital Media Technology   (JACS code: I150)

Further information is available from clicking the links above or: https://www.gov.uk/academic-technology-approval-scheme

SOURCES OF ADVICE AND SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH NETWORK (PGRNet)

The Post Graduate Research Network (PGRNet) is an official society for research students at Birmingham City University (BCU) run by research students. The purpose of PGRNet is to develop ideas on improving the research environment across all faculties through a range of activities. PGRNet is represented on Faculty and a University level committee, which allows research students to also feed their views into BCU's committee structure.

PGRNet committee has a representative from each Faculty and the Faculty Director of Research or the Associate Dean with responsibility for Research in your faculty will be able to let you know who your faculty PGRNet representative is.

If you have any ideas or event suggestions you can liaise with your faculty representative, email us at pgrnet@bcu.ac.uk or post on any one of our social networks:

Twitter: @PGRNet

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/groups/pgrnet/

STUDENT SERVICES

ASK Student Services is here to help you make the most of your time at the University. We provide high quality services that support you, enhance your learning experience and are responsive to your changing needs, before, during and after university.

Student Services information is available on our student portal, iCity (a university login is required). ASK Student Services offers Advice, Support and Knowledge on a wide range of issues:

Careers and Job Prospects	Go to Careers and Job Prospects >>
Child Care and Nursery	Go to Child Care and Nursery >>
Finance/Money Matters	Go to Finance and Money Matters >>
Health and Wellbeing	Go to Health and Wellbeing >>
Visas and Immigration	Go to Visas and Immigration >>
Student Mentoring	Go to Student Mentoring >>

Can't find the advice you need?

Send an online query to Ask Us, our e-query service and we will reply within three working days.
Phone us on +44 (0)121 331 5588.
Visit us at our offices around the University

THE STUDENTS' UNION

All research students at Birmingham City University are automatically members of the Union and can benefit from the Union's services and facilities and have a say on how it should be run. For more information on the facilities and services offered by the Union, see the Union's website www.bcusu.com

LEARNING SUPPORT

Research degree students are strongly encouraged to make full use of the wide range of support mechanisms available to them. This ranges from the library resources available on each campus to specific training to improve academic and research skills during your studies.

Detail on all training and resources available can be found at:

http://www.bcu.ac.uk/student-info/why-study-at-bcu/learning-support

LIBRARY AND LEARNING RESOURCES

Library and Learning Resources is responsible for the delivery of on-site and remotely accessed resources for students and staff to support the learning and teaching and research of the University. The Service operates libraries across all campuses and is linked to faculties via Liaison Librarians, who, in collaboration with the faculties, are responsible either for the development of the print and electronic collections, for Learning and Teaching support or for enquiry services.

The Learning and Teaching liaison team provides support for Information Literacy skills development. In order to provide support for students studying on a part-time basis, or from a distance, the Enquiry Services Team are developing services such as an online chat enquiry service and targeted Frequently Asked Questions, that can be accessed from beyond the library buildings.

Resources to support students in their learning and research are increasingly made available electronically, as this enables students with access to the internet to search for information without needing to come to a library building. This helps students who are not based near to a campus, or where other commitments make it difficult to visit the library. In addition to the provision of electronic journals an increased investment is being made in electronic books, which in addition to 24 hour availability, prevent theft and vandalism and allow students to make notes without detracting from other users' learning experience.

To inform their work Liaison Librarians use formal routes, such as attendance at faculty boards, boards of studies and programme approval and re-approval events, as well as informal links. This facilitates the effective exchange of information and allows for a tailored and proactive service to students and academic staff. In addition the service operates a Comments & Complaints system to allow students to raise any issues or concerns with the service they have received. All comments received via this system are scrutinised at a senior level within the Department and all respondents supplying contact details receive a response within a set timescale.

There are several libraries sited at different locations across the University's campuses. Please contact the relevant library for current opening hours. More information can be found at http://library.bcu.ac.uk/

CENTRE FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

We're sure that you will want to make the best of every opportunity at Birmingham City University. To help you to achieve your full potential, the Centre for Academic Success can give you advice on study skills and help you improve your English language skills.

Students may book online for a one-to-one tutorial to discuss aspects of their work, or attend a variety of study skills and English language workshops free of charge.

The Academic Skills tutors can be found at City Centre Campus, Millennium Point (3rd floor). They also visit Birmingham Conservatoire and School of Art - Bournville sites. To find out more, visit the Centre for Academic Success website.

CENTRE FOR ENHANCEMENT OF LEARNING AND TEACHING (CELT)

CELT is a central department of Birmingham City University which initiates and develops policy and support that enhances the quality of the student and staff learning experience.

Building upon a strong partnership with Birmingham City Students' Union, CELT provides guidance and funding that bring together innovators from across the University to embed the University Learning and Teaching Strategy.

CELT engages with students as partners to improve the student experience. For a fuller picture of the work CELT undertakes, please visit the CELT website.

VITAE

Vitae is dedicated to realising the potential of researchers through transforming their professional and career development.

It is an international programme led and managed by CRAC, a not-for-profit registered UK charity dedicated to active career learning and development. Working in the UK since 1968, when they ran our first project to support transitions of doctoral researchers to industry, Vitae has great expertise at enhancing the skills and career impact of researchers locally, within a global context.

Much of their work has been funded by the UK Research Councils and we have played a key role in the UK drives for high-level skills, innovation and world-class researchers.

Birmingham City University is a membership subscriber to Vitae and as such benefits from, among other things, its Researcher Development Framework, to which all research degree students have access.

Research students will be introduced to Vitae and the RDF by their supervisor, but more information is also provided at https://www.vitae.ac.uk/

Any queries or comments on the content of this handbook should be sent to: ResearchAcademicRegistry@bcu.ac.uk or **Research Degrees Office, Research & Impact Services, University House, 15 Bartholomew Row, Birmingham, B5 5JU**