Guidelines On Completion Of The 'Application To Register For A Research Degree' Form

1. Purpose Of The Form

The *Application to Register for a Research Degree* form is considered by academics within the appropriate Faculty according to university regulations. Experienced researchers use the information supplied on the forms to examine the research proposal in order to decide whether it fulfils the necessary criteria which could lead to the award of MA or MSc by Research or MPhil or PhD.

The application is judged according to three main criteria.

i) *Student Eligibility*
Before allowing registration the student must:

    a) hold formal qualifications or have research-related experience that meets the criteria laid down in the University's regulations,

    b) have embarked on the University and Faculty research methods training programmes.

ii) *Suitable Programme Of Research*
The programme of research described in the form is evaluated in terms of:

    a) its potential contribution to knowledge (bearing in mind the need for originality),

    b) its intellectual challenge (bearing in mind the level of award being sought),

    c) the feasibility of completing the research within the given time frame for MA or MSc by Research/MPhil/PhD study,

    d) access to necessary facilities or sources of data for conducting the research,

    e) the need for ethical approval for the proposed research.

iii) *Appropriate Supervision*
Suitable arrangements for the supervision of the student need to be in place.

    a) supervisors, as a team, are expected to have sufficient subject expertise and experience of successful previous supervision to provide the quality of support required for MA or MSc by Research/MPhil/PhD research,

    b) individual supervisors should not exceed the supervisory load limits set by the university.

2. Functions Of The Form

The *Application to Register for a Research Degree* form serves certain functions.

- it is a kind of *learning contract*

  The form is confirmed by the student and by the University. As such, it formalises certain commitments about the nature of the proposed research, the time frame within which the work is to be completed, and the kind of support that will be given by the University.

- it is an *official record*

  The information on the form becomes an official form in the student's record and can be scrutinised as part of any quality audit covering University procedures and standards.

- it is part of the institution's procedures for *monitoring the progress* of research degrees students

  Submission of the registration form marks a significant moment in each student's programme of study. If successful, it marks the end of the student's probationary period.

3. Presentation Of The Form

For the reasons above, careful attention needs to be given to the presentation of the forms.

a) all appropriate sections must be completed,

b) all sections must be 'typed' – except signatures,

c) the text should be free from 'typographical' errors. There should be no errors of spelling, punctuation or grammar. Clarity and precision are key qualities of good research, and this should be reflected in the application form itself,

d) referencing of works must be systematic, consistent, complete and in accord with technical conventions appropriate to the discipline within which the research is located,

e) no additional pages should be added. Note, in particular, that the details of the proposed research provided in section 10 of the form must not be expanded beyond the space provided in the template. Although there is scope to alter the relative amount of space devoted to sections 10.1, 10.2, 10.3 and 10.4, in total these must all be contained within one printed page.

4. Procedure For Submitting The Form

Responsibility for the completion of the form, the contents of the form and the submission of the form ultimately rest with the student. Supervisors will assist in the process, but 'ownership' of the form rests with the student.

a) Students are expected to have their registration completed within 6 months of enrolling for full-time students and 12 months of enrolling for part time students. During the period between enrolling with the University and registration, research students have 'probationary' status. In this initial phase students are expected to start their research methods training and refine their proposed research to the point where it can be judged according to the criteria above.

b) Research students need to plan ahead in terms of meeting the deadlines for registration. Forms for submission to the Graduate School Office need to be signed by the student or sent via the student's DMU e-mail account.

5. Guidelines For Completing Section 10 Of The Form; The Proposed Programme Of Research

Section 10.1 - Aims
The main aims should be expressed and listed as separate concise statements of what the research sets out to accomplish.

Examples:
To analyse the spatial elements of….
To develop a novel approach to the...
To identify the philosophy underlying...
To trace the historical growth of..

Section 10.2 - Background
A statement is required that:

a) shows how the research is located and contextualised in relation to the subject field,

b) indicates how the proposed research might contribute to the existing knowledge,

c) identifies, within the discussion of a) and b), a small number of key sources (5 – 10) that act as 'signposts' to the proposed research (full bibliographic details to be given in Section 12.5)

Section 10.3 - Data Collection and Analysis
Details should be given about the anticipated approach to the research. Information needs to be given about the rationale behind the approach, the anticipated scale and scope of the data collection, and the anticipated means of data analysis. Named techniques, precise numbers, actual dates etc. are vital for providing committee members with the necessary information on which to base their judgement about the proposed methodology.

Which approach(es) to research is to be adopted?
Which data collection methods will be used?
What items of data are to be collected?
What assurances can be given about access to facilities and sources of data?

What data analysis techniques will be used?
What ethical issues, if any, can be foreseen, and how will these be addressed?

Transfer Stage
If the application is for MPhil prior to transfer to PhD, please indicate the extent of progress you anticipate making by the time you apply for transfer to PhD programme.

Section 10.4 - Outcomes
Reflecting the aims identified in Section 10.1, a statement of the expected outcomes of the research must be given. These take the form of anticipated 'outputs' from the research programme – not to likely findings from the research. Outcomes do not pre-judge the findings. They relate, instead, to the end-products of the research, and take the form of things such as:

A contribution to theories of human perception with regard to…
A dataset containing up-to-date information on working practices in…..
Recommendations for good practice in relation to …
Conference papers at national and international forums…
Published articles in refereed journals….

Section 10.5 - Key References
Key bibliographic references, including those identified in Section 10.2, must be listed using an approved bibliographic format appropriate to the field of enquiry.

Technical deficiencies in this section suggest a lack of preparation and grounding in the rigours of research and as such may have a negative impact on the assessment process.

6. **Guidelines For Completing Section 12 Of The Form - Risk Factors**
   Students and supervisors are asked to assess the risks for the research project that might arise in relation to the design and operation of the research programme and, where appropriate, to specify what measures are planned to deal with such risks.

   Guidelines
   An important criterion for evaluating research proposals is that there is a suitable degree of 'robustness' to the project. This needs to be built into the planning of the project. In particular, it is important that forethought be given to the potential difficulties that might occur in relation to gaining access to vital data - for instance through contingency planning in the event that certain key resources become unavailable. Within the proposal there needs to be evidence that due consideration has been given to such foreseeable problems.

   Students and supervisors should identify any potential aspects of the data collection process where there exists a degree of uncertainty about gaining possession of the necessary data. In particular, they should assess those risks that exist through the need for authorisation:

   i)   to use specific sources of information,
   ii) to gain access to particular datasets or,

iii) to use other forms of material (e.g. copyright).

Where appropriate, student and supervisors should specify what measures are to be taken to minimise such risks and/or what contingencies exist to deal with such problems should they occur.

Remember, research by definition means taking risks because at the outset of the project you don't know the outcome, so no research project can be risk-free.