Aston University

CODE OF PRACTICE FOR RESEARCH DEGREES

Applicable to students in all years of programmes

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1 Foreword

This document is one of a suite of inter-related documents which forms an overall institutional policy for the conduct of research degrees, and which includes the institutional response to the precepts set out in the Quality Assurance Agency's Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Programmes (September 2004). University staff and students are expected to be familiar with the sections of the University code that are particularly relevant to their own responsibilities. The University code defines minimum standards for research degrees which may be supplemented at the School level by additional advice contained in School codes of practice/guidelines or in student handbooks.

Where Regulations are referred to in the text the references are to the General Regulations for Degrees by Research and Thesis.

2 Definitions

2.1 Research

The definition of research in this document draws on the definitions used in the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and its predecessor, the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) 2008.

'"Research" for our purposes is defined as 'original investigation undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding' (RAE), which is 'effectively shared' (REF). Following the REF definition, 'It **includes** work of direct relevance to the needs of commerce, industry, and to the public and voluntary sectors; scholarship*; the invention and generation of ideas, images, performances, artefacts including design, where these lead to new or substantially improved insights; and the use of existing knowledge in experimental development to produce new or substantially improved materials, devices, products and processes, including design and construction. It **excludes** routine testing and routine analysis of materials, components and processes such as for the maintenance of national standards, as distinct from the development of new analytical techniques. It also excludes the development of teaching materials that do not embody original research.

'*Scholarship for REF is defined as the creation, development and maintenance of the intellectual infrastructure of subjects and disciplines, in forms such as dictionaries, scholarly editions, catalogues and contributions to major research databases.' [REF 02.2011 'Assessment framework and guidance on submissions']. Journal articles and monographs are also important forms of scholarship.

2.2 Research Programmes

The University Code of Practice is intended to apply to a wide range of research qualifications: MPhil, PhD, Professional Doctorates, and the University award of MSc/MA (by Research), although not all sections of the document apply equally to all types of research programme.

3 Institutional Arrangements

3.1 Regulations

Regulations cover:

a requirements for admission to the programme;

b procedures for considering claims for the accreditation of prior experiential and/or prior certificated learning (AP(E)L/APL);

c the academic and procedural requirements for research awards, including supervisory arrangements;

d the requirements for progression, including monitoring and review arrangements for the award, and the minimum and maximum periods within which the programme may be completed;

e assessment methods, requirements and procedures, including the criteria for achieving the award;

f procedures for dealing with research misconduct; *

g information on the University's complaints and appeals processes.

In addition to the General Regulations for Degrees by Research and Thesis, there are also General Regulations for Research Degrees for Staff and Graduates of Aston University. These Regulations cover academic staff candidates for PhDs, the degrees of Doctor of Science and Doctor of Letters, and the PhD by Previously Published Work.

Regulations are available to staff, students, applicants and graduates via the University's intranet.

3.2 Target Setting and Monitoring

a Recruitment targets for research degrees are proposed by the Schools and agreed by the University Executive.

b Research degrees are reviewed on an annual basis by School Research Committees in accordance with the University annual programme review policy approved by the Senate. Factors to be considered in the annual programme review process by the School Research Committees are:

- i recruitment profiles; submission and completion times and rates; pass, referral and fail rates; withdrawal rates;
- ii analysis of comments from Examiners;
- iii feedback from research students, graduates and external stakeholders;
- iv feedback from the Equal Opportunities Advisor;
- v provision of research and generic skills training;
- vi any appeals or complaints dealt with at the School level.

The University's Research Committee, through the Graduate School Management Committee, ensures that these factors have been given due attention.

c The University's Research Committee, through the Graduate School Management Committee, monitors the number of appeals referred to the Academic Appeals Committee by research students, examines the reasons for them and, from analysis of appeals upheld, ensures that any necessary follow up action is taken to prevent re-occurrence.

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* expanded in more detail in the University's Code of Practice for Dealing with Allegations of Research Misconduct, REG/04/77, approved by the Senate in January 2004.

4 The Research Environment

The University is committed to only accepting research students to an environment that provides support for doing and learning about research, where high quality research is occurring and where the appropriate conditions for admission can be met.

Maintaining integrity and high standards is of central importance to the University and all members of the University's research community are responsible for maintaining professional standards. The University's Code of Conduct for Research (Appendix B), prescribes standards of work performance and conduct expected by all persons engaged in research at the University.

5 Selection, Admission and Induction of Students

5.1 Selection and Admission

The selection of research students must follow the requirements set out in the Regulations and any additional criteria set by the School and approved by the appropriate School Research Committee and the Graduate School Management Committee. The admissions criteria should be available to applicants both via the web and in printed form.

The selection of students should take into account any declared special needs the student may have, and consideration of how such needs may be supported.

Students may only be admitted to a research programme with the involvement of at least two members of University staff, one of whom must be the School's Associate Dean Research. Staff responsible for admissions must attend the requisite training provided by the University.

Students may only be admitted to the University if their application has been approved by the School's Associate Dean Research (Regulation 3.1).

Students must be sent a formal offer letter which should normally include the following information:

a the expected duration of study;
b the expectations of the student in terms of attendance, progress reports, contact with supervisors;
c arrangements for enrolment;
d references to the University's Regulations, student handbook, sources of funding;
e a clear indication of the financial costs of the programme;
f the requirements and conditions of any sponsor;
g an outline of any opportunities to undertake teaching or other duties and any conditions associated with these;
h reference to practical information, for example concerning accommodation and financial or travel information.

Other information to be provided early in the students' attendance includes:

a details of health and safety procedures;
b University and School Regulations;

c good practice in research; *
d guidance on research ethics; *
e guidance on intellectual property rights.

5.2 Induction

Students will be provided with an appropriate induction programme and introductory material providing details about where they can find essential information.

The student should meet his/her Supervisor at the earliest opportunity to discuss their respective responsibilities. For distance learning research students and other students who are away from the campus for a significant part of their research, appropriate arrangements for regular contact will be established and monitored by the Schools.

6 Supervision

All research students must be supervised by a Supervisor who is a member of the Academic Staff of the University, as defined in Section I of the Statutes of the University or by an appropriately qualified and experienced senior Research Fellow (Regulation 6.1a). The Supervisor should have the appropriate skills and subject knowledge to support, encourage and monitor research students effectively. A research student's supervision should be supplemented by one or more Associate Supervisors where this is considered beneficial (Regulation 6.3). The role of any Associate Supervisor(s) will be clarified at an initial meeting with the student and documented in the Learning Agreement (see Section 6.2).

No person may be the Supervisor for more than nine research students (maximum six FTEs) at any time without the agreement of the Associate Dean Research (Regulation 6.1c).

All new Supervisors who have not previously been involved in supervising research students must attend the University's training sessions on supervision as provided by Staff & Graduate Development. The Associate Dean Research in each School must appoint an Advisor for a Supervisor who has not previously supervised a research student to successful completion. The Advisor must be a member of the Academic staff who has supervised and examined at least one successful candidate for PhD/Professional Doctorate.

The University expects that existing Supervisors will take the initiative to update their knowledge and skills on a regular basis and attend an 'update' training session provided by the Centre for Staff and Graduate Development at least every three years.

All research students must also be given the name and contact details of at least one other member of Academic Staff from whom they may seek advice and support in the absence or unavailability of the main Supervisor, or in circumstances where a student

* see Appendix B, Research Code of Conduct.

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finds that the student/Supervisor relationship is not working well. The second member of academic staff may be from outside the specific area of the student's research topic (e.g. Postgraduate Research Tutor or Associate Dean Research). The same appointments would normally be expected to continue throughout the duration of a student's research programme.

In the event that a Supervisor leaves the University during a student's research programme, every effort will be made to appoint an appropriate alternative Supervisor and, where possible, to retain the involvement of the original Supervisor as an Associate Supervisor.

6.1 Responsibilities of Supervisors

The responsibilities of Supervisors include:

a providing satisfactory guidance and advice, and giving consideration to the appointment of Associate Supervisor(s) where this may be beneficial;

b being responsible for monitoring the student's progress;

c establishing and maintaining regular contact, at a frequency agreed with the student, and which should include structured interactions at least every 3 months to report, discuss and agree progress (Regulation 8.1);

d ensuring his/her reasonable accessibility to the student when the student needs advice;

e having input into the assessment of a student's development needs and regularly reviewing and amending those needs and advising students on their personal development planning;

f providing timely, constructive and effective feedback on the student's work, including his/her overall progress;

g ensuring that the student is aware of the need to conduct his/her research according to ethical principles, respecting any issues of confidentiality, and of the implications of research misconduct; *

h providing effective pastoral support and/or referring the student to other sources of such support;

i helping the student to interact with others working in the field of research, for example, by encouraging the student to attend relevant conferences, supporting him/her in seeking funding for such events; and, where appropriate, to submit conference papers and articles to refereed journals.

6.2 Responsibilities of research students

Students are responsible for the content, completion and submission for examination of their theses within the periods of study as prescribed in Regulations for their particular degrees.

Students are also responsible for:

a taking responsibility for their own personal and professional development and attending induction programmes as advised by their Supervisor;

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* set out in detail in the University's Code of Practice for Dealing with Allegations of Research Misconduct, REG/04/77

b ensuring that they are familiar with and comply with University Regulations and School guidelines and procedures relating to their degree, relevant Codes of Practice and other University and School requirements, health and safety advice, the monitoring of progress and terms of any sponsorship;

c setting and keeping to timetables and deadlines, including planning and submitting work as and when required and generally maintaining satisfactory progress with the programme of research;

d ensuring that in every year of enrolment they meet all of the University's requirements regarding administrative arrangements; for example, completing enrolment, re-enrolment and annual reports on progress;

e discussing with their Supervisor the type of guidance and feedback they find most helpful, and agreeing a schedule of meetings;

f initiating supervisory meetings where necessary;

g in conjunction with their Supervisor, identifying their training needs and attending research training;

h deciding when to submit their thesis (after the minimum period of study and before the end of the maximum period of study specified in the Regulations), taking due account of the Supervisor's opinion;

i ensuring that they understand the nature of their Supervisor's responsibilities (see section 6.1 above);

j advising their Supervisors of any illness, holidays or any other occasions when they will be absent from the University or from their study, or of any other circumstances likely to affect their work.

Supervisors and students will complete individual Learning Agreements as an aide memoire to covering these points. A Training Needs Analysis will be completed at the same time as the Learning Agreement.

7 Progress and Review Arrangements

At least every three months a student's progress should be formally reviewed by the Supervisor, with both student and Supervisor keeping a copy of the recorded outcomes of the meetings or other interaction if students are studying at some distance from the University.

At the end of each year of research the Supervisor must submit to the School Research Committee a report on the performance of each research student for their consideration. The annual progress report will include a review of the student's Training Needs.

For MPhil/PhD students, at the end of the first full-time year or second part-time year of research the annual report will contain a recommendation concerning the student's progression to either the MPhil or PhD degree programme, based on the student's report on the research work and a *viva voce* examination (Regulations Section 8: Reports). Professional Doctorate students will have a similar progression point specified for their programme. Before the end of the second year (fourth year for part-time students) MPhil/PhD and Professional Doctorate students are required to complete a minimum of *either* an oral presentation of all or part of their research *or* write up all or part of their research as a paper (without the requirement to submit for publication). The Supervisor will consult with the student about which task he or she is expected to complete.

All Schools should have clear and transparent procedures for the monitoring of student performance and students should be notified in writing by the School of their review timetable and of the outcomes of the key stages above.

8 Development of Research and Other Skills

The University will provide training in research and generic skills appropriate, wherever possible, to a student's individual needs and as defined in the Training Needs Analysis initiated at the beginning of the first year as part of the Learning Agreement and updated on an annual basis thereafter. Training will be provided by the Schools, and by the Graduate Development Team. Provision of skills training will be kept under review by Schools as part of their annual review of research degrees programmes, and by the Graduate School Management Committee.

Guidance, support and training will be provided to, and will be expected to be undertaken by, students who have opportunities for teaching and/or assessing.

9 Feedback Mechanisms

As part of the annual programme review process, Schools will consider and where necessary respond to feedback from research students, graduates, Examiners, employers, sponsors and other external stakeholders, and the University's Equal Opportunities Advisor. School Annual Programme Review Reports are subsequently considered by the Graduate School Management Committee.

Students will be given the opportunity to provide confidential individual feedback as well as the opportunity to take part in research committee meetings or staff-student consultative meetings. Students will be informed of actions taken in response to their feedback.

10 Assessment

The assessment of students is on the basis of an appropriate body of work, as specified in the Regulations for that award and a *viva voce* examination conducted according to the guidance set out in Appendix C, Conduct of the *Viva Voce*.

Two Examiners are appointed to consider the candidate and one Examiner must be external to the University. In the case of staff candidates, both Examiners must be external to the University (see General Regulations for Research Degrees for Staff and Graduates of Aston University). The Internal Examiner may not be the student's Supervisor, the Advisor to the Supervisor (if appointed), an Associate Supervisor (if appointed), or otherwise involved in the supervision of the student (e.g. a member of a supervisory team).

All Examiners must be appropriately experienced in research as judged by the Associate Dean Research and the Senate, and at least one of the Examiners must have experience of successful PhD supervision or PhD examination.

Recommendations for the appointment of Examiners must be submitted using the form designed for this purpose.

All Examiners' appointments must be approved by the Senate or by the Vice-Chancellor or nominee on behalf of the Senate.

Examiners must submit individual independent written reports on the student's thesis before the *viva voce* and a joint written report after the *viva voce*.

For all *viva voce* an independent, non-examining Chair should be appointed, normally from within the relevant School, except for staff candidates when the Chair should normally be from a different School. The Chair should not have had a substantial involvement in the candidate's work or have been involved in the appointment of the Examiners, but should have experience of research degree assessment (see Appendix C for further guidance).

11 Student Representations

The University has approved procedures for dealing with complaints and appeals which may be found on the Registry website.

RPS/SJDQSC working parties/research/2004
Last updated August2012/REGISTRY/AJB

References and Acknowledgements

- QAA (2004) Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes.
- HEFCE (2003) Improving standards in postgraduate research degree programmes, consultation paper May 2003/23, and consultation responses.
- Aston University, School Codes of Practice and Learning Contracts.
- University of Bath, Regulations 2004/05.
- University of Birmingham Regulations and Codes of Practice 2004/05.

Appendix A: VITAE RESEARCHER DEVELOPMENT STATEMENT (ISBN 978-1-906774-19-6)*

The UK is committed to enhancing the higher-level capabilities of the UK workforce including the development of world-class researchers. Researchers are critical to economic success, addressing major global challenges, and building a leading knowledge economy.

The Researcher Development Statement (RDS) sets out the knowledge, behaviours and attributes of effective and highly skilled researchers appropriate for a wide range of careers.

The RDS is for policy makers and research organisations that provide personal, professional and career development for researchers in higher education.

The Researcher Development Statement is derived from the Researcher Development Framework (RDF), a major new approach to researcher development, which aims to enhance our capacity to build the UK workforce, develop world-class researchers and build our research base.

The RDS and RDF will contribute to researcher training and development in the UK by providing a strategic statement (RDS) and operational framework (RDF) to support the implementation of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers[1] , the QAA Code of practice for research degree programmes[2] and the 'Roberts'[3] recommendations for postgraduate researchers and research staff.

The RDS is structured in four domains, which encompass what researchers need to know to do research, how to be effective in their approach to research, when working with others, and in contributing to the wider environment. Within each of the domains are three sub-domains and associated descriptors, which describe different aspects of being a researcher.

Domain A: Knowledge and intellectual abilities The knowledge, intellectual abilities and techniques to do research.	**Domain B: Personal effectiveness** The personal qualities and approach to be an effective researcher.
Domain C: Research governance and organisation The knowledge of the standards, requirements and professionalism to do research.	**Domain D: Engagement, influence and impact** The knowledge and skills to work with others and ensure the wider impact of research.

The Researcher Development Statement is an evolution of the Research Councils' Joint Skills Statement (JSS) [4] and replaces the JSS as the key reference statement for the development of postgraduate researchers' skills and attributes and researchers employed in higher education. All the skills and attributes of the JSS have been incorporated into the RDS. A two-way mapping of the RDS and the JSS is available on the RDF section of the Vitae website.

For more information and to comment on the Researcher Development Framework and associated Statement go to www.vitae.ac.uk/rdf

[1] http://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/505181/Concordat-to-Support-the-Career-Development-of-Researchers.html [2] www.qaa.ac.uk

[3] http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http:/www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/set_for_success.htm
[4] http://www.vitae.ac.uk/jss

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1. GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND POLICY

Maintaining integrity and high standards is of central importance to the University's commitment to research, and it is the responsibility of all members of the University's research community to maintain professional standards. This Code of Conduct prescribes standards of work performance and conduct expected by all persons engaged in research at the University.

Researchers should, in all aspects of their research:

1. Observe legal and ethical requirements laid down by the University or any other bodies properly laying down such requirements, including those of any countries outside the UK where the research is being conducted;
2. Ensure that methods and results should, subject to appropriate confidentiality commitments to individual privacy or commercially protected information, be open to independent scrutiny through appropriate documentation of methods and storing of data;
3. Demonstrate honesty, accountability, integrity and professionalism, observe fairness and equity, and avoid, or declare, conflicts of interest;
4. Ensure clear and honest attribution and acknowledgement of the direct and indirect contribution of colleagues, collaborators and others;
5. Ensure the rights, safety and wellbeing of those associated with the research, both as researchers and subjects of research, including that there are suitable additional insurance provisions in place where necessary (eg where clinical intervention with a subject is required).
6. Comply with guidance concerning the funding of the research project issued by the University, funding body/ies and/or other relevant organisational body/ies, including guidelines for purchasing resources and employing staff, and requirements for monitoring and audit;
7. Raise any concerns (eg risk or harm to participants, financial irregularities, potential conflicts of interest) with the Executive Dean of the School as soon as they become aware of them.

The UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) has compiled a checklist of key good practice points which should be considered when embarking on any research project and researchers are strongly advised to use this and keep a brief record of their responses.

The checklist may be particularly helpful for **collaborative projects** involving researchers from partner organisations, including outside the UK, in order to ensure that all parties involved have considered the key points and reached agreement on standards and procedures to be followed. The checklist is provided in Section 4 below and is also available at www.ukrio.org.

Further advice on collaborative provision, including a risk assessment *pro forma*, is available on the University website at http://www1.aston.ac.uk/registry/for-staff/regsandpolicies/collaborativeprovision/

* title changed from Research Code of Practice, June 2005

2. SCOPE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Senate of the University, through its Research Committee, has general responsibility to ensure compliance with the Code across the University. Executive Deans have a responsibility to ensure compliance with the Code in their Schools. All staff and students undertaking research must familiarise themselves with the Code and ensure that its provisions are observed. The University will ensure all newly appointed researchers and research students are made aware of the Code, and the Supervisors of students involved in research will seek to ensure that students comply with the Code.

3. RESEARCH PRACTICES

3.1 Guidance from Professional Bodies

1. Where available, researchers will observe the standards of research practice set out in guidelines and codes of practice published by scientific and learned societies, relevant research councils, sponsoring charities, regulatory bodies, the Department of Health/National Health Service and other relevant professional bodies.
2. All researchers should be aware of the legal requirements which regulate their work and should ensure that all participants, including those from outside the UK, are also aware of them.

3.2 Research Methods and Data

1. There should be clarity at the outset of each research programme as to the ownership of, where relevant, data and samples used or created in the course of the research, and the results of the research. This is particularly important in the case of collaborative research projects.
2. Research methods adopted in the conduct of the research must be fully documented in a manner that would facilitate their replication by independent researchers.
3. Experiments should be conducted in accordance with the University Health and Safety Policy Document.
4. Research data must be recorded in a durable and auditable form so that they can readily be recovered. They must be retained intact normally for a period of at least five years (or the minimum period defined by research sponsors or relevant professional or statutory bodies, whichever is the longer) from the date of any publication based on it. Back-up records should always be kept for data stored on a computer or electronically. Research Groups, Institutes or Schools must establish procedures for retention of research data in a form which would enable retrieval by a third party, subject to any limitation imposed by the confidentiality of individuals or commercially sensitive data. Research data related to publications should be available for discussion with other research workers, except where confidentiality provisions prevail.
5. It is the duty of any principal investigator in any research project to comply with the Data Protection Act, and to ensure that copyright is not breached.
6. Confidentiality provisions relating to publications may apply in circumstances where the University or the research worker has made or given confidentiality undertakings to third parties or confidentiality is required to protect intellectual property rights. It is the obligation of the research worker to enquire as to whether confidentiality provisions apply and of the head of research group/institute, or School, to inform research workers of their obligations with respect to these provisions.

3.3. Ethical Practice

The University's Ethics Documentation is available on the University website at http://www1.aston.ac.uk/registry/for-staff/regsandpolicies/ethics-policy-and-procedures/.

3.3. a. Research Involving Human Participants

1. All research involving human participants should be registered via the University online ethical registration system and, where appropriate, be considered and approved either by the relevant School Research Ethics Committee or, for projects carrying a higher risk, the University Ethics Committee. Approval from other regulatory bodies such as the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority or the Gene Therapy Advisory Committee of the UK should also be sought where necessary.
2. Researchers should ensure the consent of participants in research, along with the confidentiality of any personal information, and that the research fulfills any legal requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998.

3.3. b. Research Involving Animals

1. Research involving animals should have approval through the appropriate Ethical Review Process, and may require Home Office licenses for the institution, the investigator and the project.
2. Researchers should consider, at an early stage in the design of any research involving animals, the opportunity for reduction, replacement and refinement of animal involvement.

3.4 Supervision

1. It is the responsibility of Executive Deans to ensure that appropriate direction of research and supervision of researchers is provided. Training in supervisory skills should be provided where appropriate.
2. Supervision of research must be in accordance with the University's Code of Practice for Research Degrees and with any requirements which may be prescribed from time to time by the Senate through its Learning and Teaching or Research Committees.
3. A person must only accept appointment as a member of the Supervisory team for a research student if that person expects to be able to discharge their responsibilities as set out in the Code of Practice for Research Degrees.

3.5 Publication of Results

1. Anyone listed as an author on a publication should accept responsibility for ensuring that he/she is familiar with the contents of the paper and can identify his/her contribution to it. The practice of honorary authorship is unacceptable.
2. Any person who has participated in a substantial way in conceiving, executing or interpreting at least part of the relevant research should be given the opportunity to be included as an author of a publication derived from that research.
3. A publication must contain appropriate reference to, and acknowledgement of, the contributions made by all participants who have made what might reasonably be regarded as a significant contribution to the relevant research. In particular the work of research students, research staff and support staff should be recognised in any publication derived from research to which they have made a significant contribution.

3.6 Conflict of Interest

1. A conflict arises when a person's judgement concerning a primary interest, such as scientific knowledge, could be unduly influenced by a secondary influence, such as financial gain or personal advancement.
2. A researcher must make full disclosure of any personal potential or actual conflict of research interest. Conflict of interest includes any personal or close family affiliation or financial involvement with any organisation sponsoring or providing financial support for a research project undertaken by a research worker. Financial involvement includes direct personal financial interest, provision of personal benefits (such as travel and accommodation) and provision of material or facilities for personal use. The provision of sponsored studentships, or elements of travel/accommodation for a student, is excluded from this definition.
3. A disclosure of a personal conflict of interest must be made to the Executive Dean as soon as reasonably practicable.
4. A researcher must comply with a direction made by the Executive Dean in relation to a personal conflict of interest in research. Executive Deans may seek advice from the Chief Operating Officer in cases of doubt.

3.7 Misconduct in Research

1. Misconduct in research is constituted by a failure to comply with the provisions of the Code, and includes, but is not limited to, the following:
   - Fraud: deliberate deception, including fabrication or falsification of research data, and the omission from analysis and publication of inconvenient data
   - Plagiarism and piracy: the copying or deliberate exploitation of another person's ideas, work or research data, without appropriate acknowledgement
2. The University has a separate policy and Code of Conduct covering misconduct. This code must be adhered to at all times:
   - Aston University: *Code of Practice for dealing with allegations of Research Misconduct*

4. UKRIO's RECOMMENDED CHECKLIST FOR RESEARCHERS

The following Checklist is included in the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO)'s *Code of Practice for Research: Promoting good practice and preventing misconduct* (http://www.ukrio.org/ukR10htre/UKRIO-Code-of-Practice-for-Research1.pdf).

The Checklist lists the key points of good practice in research for a research project and is applicable to all subject areas.

Before conducting your research, and bearing in mind that, subject to legal and ethical requirements, roles and contributions may change during the time span of the research:

1 Does the proposed research address pertinent question(s) and is it designed either to add to existing knowledge about the subject in question or to develop methods for research into it?
2 Is your research design appropriate for the question(s) being asked?
3 Will you have access to all necessary skills and resources to conduct the research?
4 Have you conducted a risk assessment to determine:
  a whether there are any ethical issues and whether ethics review is required;

b the potential for risks to the organisation, the research, or the health, safety and well-being of researchers and research participants; and
c what legal requirements govern the research?

5 Will your research comply with all legal and ethical requirements and other applicable guidelines, including those from other organisations and/or countries if relevant?
6 Will your research comply with all requirements of legislation and good practice relating to health and safety?
7 Has your research undergone any necessary ethics review (see 4(a) above), especially if it involves animals, human participants, human material or personal data?
8 Will your research comply with any monitoring and audit requirements?
9 Are you in compliance with any contracts and financial guidelines relating to the project?
10 Have you reached an agreement relating to intellectual property, publication and authorship?
11 Have you reached an agreement relating to collaborative working, if applicable?
12 Have you agreed the roles of researchers and responsibilities for management and supervision?
13 Have all conflicts of interest relating to your research been identified, declared and addressed?
14 Are you aware of the guidance from all applicable organisations on misconduct in research?

When conducting your research:

1 Are you following the agreed research design for the project?
2 Have any changes to the agreed research design been reviewed and approved if applicable?
3 Are you following best practice for the collection, storage and management of data?
4 Are agreed roles and responsibilities for management and supervision being fulfilled?
5 Is your research complying with any monitoring and audit requirements?

When finishing your research:

1 Will your research and its findings be reported accurately, honestly and within a reasonable time frame?
2 Will all contributions to the research be acknowledged?
3 Are agreements relating to intellectual property, publication and authorship being complied with?
4 Will research data be retained in a secure and accessible form and for the required duration?
5 Will your research comply with all legal, ethical and contractual requirements?

REFERENCES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Code of Conduct draws upon the following documents:

- UK Research Integrity Office (2009) *Code of Practice for Research: Promoting good practice and preventing misconduct*
- Office of Science and Technology (2002) *Statement by the Director General of the Research Councils and the Chief Executives of the Research Councils on Safeguarding Good Scientific Practice*
- The Wellcome Trust (2002) *Guidelines on Good Research Practice*
- EPSRC (1999) *Good Practice in Scientific and Engineering Research*

- Medical Research Council (2000) *MRC Good Research Practice*
- BBSRC (2004) *Statement on Safeguarding Good Scientific Practice*
- Aston University (2004) *Statutes; Codes of Practice; Terms of Reference of Committees*
- Birmingham University (2002) *Code of Research Practice*

Approved by the Senate January 2004 (REG/04/76); updated in line with Senate approval of new institutional Code of Practice for Research Degrees June 2005. Approved by the Senate October 2010 following revisions to take account of the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO)'s *Code of Practice for Research: Promoting good practice and preventing misconduct*.

Appendix C: Conduct of the *viva voce* examination on a research student's thesis/portfolio

The following paragraphs present guidance for the arrangements for and conduct of the *viva voce*.

1. The Chair of the *Viva Voce*

An independent, non-examining Chair should be appointed for all *viva voce*. The Chair should be selected by the School's Associate Dean Research from a pool of suitably qualified Academic Staff who have experience of research degree assessment.

The Chair should be independent in that he or she should not have had a substantial direct involvement in the candidate's work or have been involved in the appointment of the Examiners.

The Chair must be impartial and cannot therefore be the student's Supervisor or Internal Examiner, and must be from a different research area. The Chair must not be nominated by the Supervisor or Internal Examiner. In the case of a staff candidate, the Chair should be from a different School.

2. The Role of the Chair

The role of the Independent Chair is to:

i) ensure the *viva voce* examination is conducted in an open, professional, and non-intimidating manner by all parties involved;
ii) be prepared to intervene in the process if the above requirements are not complied with;
iii) ensure that only those parties who should be actively involved in the *viva voce* process are participating and that other attending parties (such as a Supervisor) do not take an active role;
iv) suggest appropriate breaks in particularly long examinations;
v) provide an opinion on points of order or University regulations if requested to do so by the Examiners or the student;
vi) sign at the end of the *viva voce* examination to confirm that the examination was conducted fairly, professionally and without bias.

3. Arrangements for the *Viva Voce*

The Supervisor should notify the Examiners, the student, and the Independent Chair, in writing, giving at least two weeks' notice, of the date, time, place and names of those attending the *viva voce* examination.

The Chair must not be sent a copy of the thesis.

4. Purpose/Aim of the *Viva Voce*

i) Provides the student with an opportunity to defend his or her thesis;
ii) assists the Examiners in their decision as to whether or not the student has met the requirements for the degree;

iii) examines the general field within which the subject of the thesis lies;
iv) allows detailed discussion of the thesis;
v) explores the ideas and theories proposed in the thesis;
vi) clarifies points of ambiguity;
vii) satisfies the Examiners that the thesis is the student's own work.

5. Conduct of the *Viva Voce*

i) The *viva voce* should be held in a suitable room without interruptions from others;
ii) if any of those who should be attending are unable to be present, then the *viva voce* must normally be re-arranged;
iii) time should be made available on the day of, and before the *viva voce*, for Examiners to meet and discuss their preliminary reports and to discuss the approach to the examination;
iv) the Chair should introduce those present, putting them at their ease, explaining the form the *viva voce* will take and what happens afterwards. The Chair will only intervene if there is a danger of misunderstanding, unfairness, bias or unprofessional behaviour, but should not hesitate to do so if this is the case;
v) each Examiner should contribute, but with the External Examiner taking the lead;
vi) there are no rules governing the length of the *viva voce*. It is at the Examiners' discretion to make the *viva voce* as long or short as they think necessary. Short breaks are permitted if necessary/requested;
vii) there may be intense questioning, but it should be non-aggressive. If, in the opinion of the Chair, the questioning becomes aggressive, he or she should intervene;
viii) the Supervisor may be invited by the Examiners or the Independent Chair to participate in discussions;
ix) no-one, at any time, should indicate the likely outcome.

6. After the *Viva Voce*

i) The student and Supervisor (if present) should be asked to withdraw;
ii) the Examiners should deliberate;
iii) the Examiners may invite the student and Supervisor to hear the recommendation (noting that this is provisional only);
iv) the Examiners' Reports on the *viva voice* examination and the Joint Recommendation should be completed and submitted to the appropriate School Office, together with a list of any corrections or revisions, ideally immediately after the conclusion of the *viva voce*. The Examiners must also provide the student with a copy of any corrections and revisions;
v) the Independent Chair should sign the Examiner's report on the *viva voice* examination to indicate whether or not the examination was conducted fairly, professionally and without bias;
vi) there must be formal approval of recommendations by the University's Senate or Vice-Chancellor or nominee on behalf of the Senate.

REG/SJD
Last updated (Registry/AJB) August 2012