

CHAPTER 9

Professional Doctorate Awards

9.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the quality assurance processes relating to the establishment of new Professional Doctorate awards and builds on the **Framework for Professional Doctorates in TU Dublin**.

9.2 Definition and Conceptual Foundations

Professional Doctorates at TU Dublin are level 10 structured doctorate research awards, wherein the candidate makes a significant original contribution to practice in a professional context and to the academic discipline. The degree combines taught professional skills development and original research of publishable quality, which transforms and extends professional knowledge through practice, theory and research.

These awards recognise that high-level knowledge creation can occur not only through discipline-led theoretical advancement, but also through systematic, critical engagement with complex real-world professional challenges.

A Professional Doctorate is distinguished by its dual contribution. Candidates are required to make:

1. A significant original contribution to professional practice, demonstrated through the generation of practice-based knowledge that enhances, transforms, or critically reconfigures how professional work is understood and enacted within a defined context; and
2. A scholarly contribution to the relevant academic discipline, evidenced through rigorous theoretical framing, methodological integrity, and research outputs of publishable quality.

Central to this model is a clear distinction between discipline and practice. The academic discipline provides the theoretical foundations, conceptual frameworks, and research methodologies that ensure scholarly rigour and generalisability. Professional practice, by contrast, provides the context, problems, and sites of inquiry, where knowledge is applied, tested, and refined in response to real-world constraints and organisational or societal needs.

The research undertaken within a Professional Doctorate is expected to be problem-driven and practice-led, emerging from significant challenges within professional settings. However, it must also be theoretically informed and analytically robust, ensuring that findings extend beyond the immediate context and contribute to broader disciplinary debates. The outcomes of this research may include new models, frameworks, methodologies, or evidence-based practices that demonstrably enhance professional knowledge and inform future practice.

9.3 Regulatory Compliance

Professional Doctorates are Level 10 awards on Ireland's National Qualifications Framework.

Ireland's Framework of Good Practice (IFGP) for Research Degree Programmes (2019) categorises Professional Doctorates as research degree programmes.

Professional Doctorates must comply with the Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Research Degree Programmes (2017) from Quality and Qualifications Ireland.

Professional Doctorates should align with the National Framework for Doctoral Education (2023) and Ireland's Framework of Good Practice (IFGP) for Research Degree Programmes (2019).

Professional Doctorates should operate within the current edition of the Graduate Research Regulations (GRR), which can be updated if required.

9.4 Criteria to Establish a Professional Doctorate Award

Proposals for new Professional Doctorate awards must address the requirements outlined in the Framework for Professional Doctorate in TU Dublin and must clearly demonstrate that they meet all of the following criteria:

- The proposed Professional Doctorate programme is in an area or areas of disciplinary excellence and is designed to advance problem-driven and practice-led research in professional contexts.
- The proposal for the Professional Doctorate award is fully supported by the relevant Faculty Board or equivalent.
- A thorough market analysis demonstrates:
 - A need for the proposed Professional Doctorate award and a gap in the Irish market;
 - The programme offers long-term strategic benefits for TU Dublin;
 - There is evidence to support a critical mass of applicants to ensure cohorts of students for at least the next 5 years and the financial sustainability of the programme.
- The requirements for the training of research students are met by the proposed programme of study.
- There are expertise and resources for the programme's professional skills development and supervision.
- There is a blended approach for delivery of the programme, with planned in-person on-campus and online experiences.
- The programme is comprehended to the current edition of the TU Dublin Graduate Research Regulations.
- The programme is aligned to Ireland's National Framework for Doctoral Education, Framework of Good Practice for Research Degree Programmes and QQI's statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Research Degree Programmes.

9.5 Guidelines to Establish a Professional Doctorate Award

The guidelines to establish, design, develop and implement a new Professional Doctorate award in TU Dublin are as follows:

Step 1: Advice

The proposer contacts the relevant Faculty Head of Research for initial advice and guidance.

Step 2: New Award Title Preliminary Proposal

The proposer completes the PGR 1F form (Preliminary Proposal to establish a new Professional Doctorate Award Title). In addition, all preliminary proposals must include a statement of support from the relevant Faculty or equivalent.

Step 3: New Award Title Preliminary Evaluation

The Graduate Research School Board (GRSB) considers the viability of the preliminary proposal, and how

it addresses the 'Criteria to Establish Professional Doctorate Award' and the 'TU Dublin Framework for Professional Doctorates in TU Dublin'.

The GRSB has final approval of such preliminary proposals taking account of the views of the relevant Faculty Board or equivalent.

Step 4: Preparation of Student Handbook

The proposer submits a Student Handbook for the new Professional Doctorate Award to the Graduate Research School Board, together with a statement of support from the relevant Faculty Board or equivalent.

Modules: For Professional Doctorates, all discipline, professional practice and research skills modules must be at NFQ level 9 or 10. All Professional Doctorate students must complete Module 1 Research Integrity delivered by the Graduate Research School. Remaining modules may draw upon Graduate Research School Modules 2-5 and from existing programmes, and new modules can be developed.

Any new module descriptors should be **input via the Programme and Module Catalogue (PMC) and comply with Quality Assurance and Enhancement requirements for Designing and Teaching and Assessing a Module**. New Module Codes should be requested from the Curriculum Management Team in advance of submitting the module for approval through the Module Code request form.

Step 5: Student Handbook Evaluation

The Graduate Research School Board (GRSB) will establish a panel to review the Student Handbook (including associated modules) for the new Professional Doctorate award, specifically on how it addresses the 'Criteria to Establish Professional Doctorate Awards' and 'TU Dublin Framework for Professional Doctorates in TU Dublin', and how it aligns with the current Graduate Research Regulations. The panel will include at least three GRSB members who are not members of the proposing School(s). The panel will meet with all Heads of School (or nominees) involved in the delivery of modules and supervision for the Professional Doctorate award to discuss the proposed programme of study. The GRSB has final approval taking account of the views of the Panel and the relevant Faculty Board or equivalent. The award will be subsequently noted at the University Programmes Board (UPB).

Step 6: Minor Changes to Graduate Research Regulations

The Graduate Research School Board will review any minor changes to the Graduate Research Regulations to incorporate the new Professional Doctorate award. Minor changes to the Graduate Research Regulations will be approved through the Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Sub-Committee (AQAE) of Academic Council.