



QA48 Annex 2 – Student Engagement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement for Doctoral Provision

1. Purpose and Scope

- 1.1 This Annex sets out the arrangements and responsibilities governing student engagement with quality assurance and enhancement (QA&E) of teaching, learning, research, and academic experience for Doctoral provision. This applies to all Doctoral programmes administered solely or primarily by the University of Bath, including:
 - PhD programmes
 - Professional doctorate programmes
 - Integrated PhDs
 - Doctoral programmes delivered through Doctoral Training Entities (henceforth DTEs)
- 1.2 It defines how student engagement with QA&E is delivered in practice and supports the implementation of QA48 for those cohorts of students that meet the definition above.
- 1.3 This Annex should be read alongside QA48, which defines institutional expectations for student engagement in QA&E across all modes of study.
- 1.4 These expectations are in line with the QAA Sector-agreed [Code of Practice for research degrees](#). These processes enable doctoral students to make an effective, inclusive, and influential contribution to their experience.
- 1.5 Ongoing informal dialogue between staff and doctoral students is a core feature of the research environment. Formal representation structures, including Staff Student Liaison Meetings (SSLMs), detailed below, provide an additional structured mechanism through which doctoral students can contribute to quality assurance, enhancement, and decision-making.
- 1.6 Please note that student engagement in QA&E processes for primarily on-campus UG and PGT courses are outlined in QA48 Annex 1 and for distance learning courses are outlined in QA48 Annex 3 and differ in important ways from those outlined here.

2. Study Mode Specific Requirements

2.1 Engagement mechanisms for doctoral students must reflect the distinctive characteristics of doctoral study and ensure equitable opportunities to contribute to QA&E. In particular, arrangements must:

- Reflect variation in the stage of study, ensuring engagement is appropriate across the doctoral lifecycle
- Focus on the research degree academic experience, including supervision, researcher development, and access to academic resources
- Provide opportunities for both individual and collective engagement, recognising the individualised nature of doctoral study
- Be flexible and inclusive, accommodating small or dispersed cohorts, part-time study, and periods of remote or off-campus research
- Ensure safe and independent channels for feedback, taking account of supervisory relationships
- Support participation across different forms of provision, including professional doctorates and DTEs
- Enable doctoral students to contribute meaningfully to QA&E processes and decision-making, including monitoring, review, and enhancement activities.

3. Individual Doctoral Student Engagement

3.1 The University enables doctoral students to contribute individually to the QA&E of their academic experience through structured feedback mechanisms, primarily student surveys.

3.2 Individual engagement provides an evidence base to inform the monitoring, review, and enhancement of doctoral provision, including:

- The quality of supervision and supervisory arrangements
- Researcher development and training provision
- Access to academic resources and facilities
- Other aspects of the academic and research environment that support learning and progression

3.3 Feedback from doctoral student surveys must be:

- Systematically analysed
- Considered alongside other sources of evidence
- Used to inform decision-making at programme, Faculty/School and institutional level

3.4 Responsibility for responding to survey feedback rests with:

- Directors of Studies (Doctoral), or equivalent, for programme-level matters

- Faculty/School Directors of Doctoral Studies for Faculty/School-level matters
- University Doctoral Studies Committee (henceforth UDSC) and the Doctoral College for institution-wide matters

3.5 Student representatives should be engaged, where appropriate, in:

- Interpreting survey findings
- Contributing to the development of enhancement actions

3.6 Outcomes of survey feedback must be communicated to doctoral students in a timely manner, demonstrating how their input has informed improvements to their academic experience.

3.7 Detailed requirements for the design, administration and governance of student surveys are set out in QA48 Annex 4: Student Surveys.

4. Doctoral Student Collective Engagement with QA&E – Staff-Student Liaison Meetings (SSLMs)

The University enables doctoral students to contribute individually to the QA&E of their academic experience through structured feedback mechanisms, primarily student surveys.

4.1 SSLM Constitution and Membership

4.1.1 Membership of SSLMs must:

- Cover all relevant programmes, either individually or through appropriate groupings
- Include relevant Directors of Studies (Doctoral) Include at least one student representative per programme or cohort, elected or selected in a transparent manner.

4.1.2 With the approval of The SU and the Doctoral College, individual PhD programmes may adopt the whole-cohort student engagement QA&E processes set out for distance learning courses in QA48 Annex 3. Where this approach is adopted, the reporting requirements (such as the need for completion and submission of action trackers), specified in Annex 2 will continue to apply.

Student representative recruitment

4.1.3 A Doctoral Student Representative (henceforth Doctoral Rep) is a student elected or selected through an agreed and transparent process to represent doctoral students within a programme, department, Faculty/School or DTE.

4.1.4 Where Doctoral Reps are recruited through local processes and not The SU electoral process, Directors of Studies (Doctoral) are asked to liaise with The SU to ensure inclusive and transparent recruitment processes are followed.

4.1.5 The SU must be notified of the names of new Doctoral Reps in a timely manner to ensure that they are offered training and support and are included in Doctoral Executive Council communications.

4.2 SSLM Terms of Reference and Function

4.2.1 SSLMs must:

- Provide a structured, two-way channel between Directors of Studies (Doctoral) and Doctoral Reps
- Review previous actions at the first meeting of the academic year
- Consider survey outcomes, including PRES/PTES, and contribute to enhancement planning
- Consider other matters referred through governance routes

4.2.2 SSLMs should explicitly consider feedback on the research environment, including:

- Supervision and supervisory arrangements
- Researcher development opportunities
- Access to resources and facilities
- Research culture, community, and peer networks as they relate to the quality of the research and learning environment

4.3 Scope and Boundaries

4.3.1 SSLMs are not complaints or appeals mechanisms. Students must be clearly signposted to appropriate routes for:

- Complaints and appeals
- Academic or research misconduct
- Wellbeing and safeguarding
- Other formal procedures.

5. SSLM Administration

5.1 SSLMs must:

- Normally meet at least four times per academic year or follow an equivalent pattern that demonstrably provides routine engagement opportunities for doctoral students
- Normally meet for the first time within six weeks of the start of the academic year, or equivalent for non-standard academic patterns

5.2 Additional meetings may be scheduled if required, normally with at least five working days' notice.

- 5.3 Communications and documentation must be provided in accessible formats and channels.

Capturing the meetings

- 5.4 Agendas are not required for SSLMs but, where they are agreed, they must be circulated at least 5 working days in advance.
- 5.5 SSLMs must maintain an action tracker capturing attendance, issues raised, actions agreed, responsible owners and deadlines, with progress updates provided at each meeting.
- 5.6 Completed action trackers form the basis for monitoring and assurance and must be completed.
- 5.7 Minutes are not a requirement for Doctoral SSLMs but may be useful for departments or DTEs to capture broader discussion. These do not need to be submitted to F/SDSC, the Doctoral College or the SU.
- 5.8 Directors of Studies (Doctoral) are responsible for agendas, action tracking, making the completed action trackers available to the Doctoral College and dissemination of the outcomes to the wider student cohort in a timely manner.

Closing the feedback loop

- 5.9 Action trackers must be shared with the wider doctoral cohort and made available to The SU, Doctoral College, and F/SDSC. Where actions cannot be taken, the rationale and any alternative steps must be recorded.
- 5.10 Members of the SSLM are responsible for ensuring that updates on actions taken following the last meeting are a standard part of the business of the meeting and communication to the cohort. It is recognised that the University cannot always act on every aspect of student feedback, but students should be made aware of the potential limitations to action.

6. Collective Doctoral Student Representation at a University Level – Doctoral Executive Council

- 6.1 The Doctoral Executive Council provides a forum through which doctoral student representatives contribute collectively to the QA&E of the academic and research degree experience. This replaces the University Doctoral Staff Student Liaison Committee.
- 6.2 The Doctoral Executive Council will normally meet four times per year and is open to all doctoral student representatives to raise and discuss matters relating to the quality of doctoral provision.

- 6.3 The Council is led by The SU, with the Doctoral College contributing through attendance or formal reporting, ensuring that discussions are connected to institutional QA&E processes and governance structures.
- 6.4 Some discussions within the Doctoral Executive Council must focus on themes relating to the quality, standards, and enhancement of doctoral teaching, learning, research and academic experience.
- 6.5 Key issues, themes, and actions arising from meetings must be captured through an action tracker and, where appropriate, minutes.
- 6.6 The Students' Union and the Doctoral College are jointly responsible for:
- Monitoring Doctoral Executive Council action trackers
 - Ensuring that issues are progressed through appropriate governance routes
 - Ensuring that outcomes are communicated to doctoral students in line with institutional expectations for closing the feedback loop
- 6.7 A summary of key themes, actions and delivery metrics arising from the Doctoral Executive Council are incorporated into the annual monitoring and assurance report to UDSC, as detailed in 7.6.

7. SSLM Reporting, Monitoring & Assurance

Oversight of SSLMs for Doctoral Students is maintained through a structured reporting, monitoring, and assurance framework. Reporting, monitoring and assurance must ensure that Doctoral student engagement with QA&E is effective, inclusive and demonstrably influential in informing decision-making and improvement of the academic experience.

Reporting and Monitoring

- 7.1 SSLMs have a formal line of report to the F/SDSC. This reporting requirement is fulfilled through the submission of SSLM action trackers.
- 7.2 Under the guidance of the Associate Deans (Research), F/SDSC is responsible for:
- Monitoring the operation of SSLMs, including their membership and frequency
 - Ensuring that SSLMs provide appropriate coverage across programmes
 - Confirming that student issues are considered and responded to effectively identifying and integrating new initiatives into existing departmental and programme-level action plans to enhance both the experience of doctoral students and the doctoral research environment, particularly in relation to teaching, learning, research, and the wider academic experience

- 7.3 Action trackers are also made available to The SU and the Doctoral College to support institutional oversight.
- 7.4 UDSC will monitor progress with departmental and Faculty/School action plans at an institutional level with the aim of:
- Ensuring accountability for action plans and issues for concerns
 - Offering an opportunity for wider themes to be highlighted at an institutional level
 - Promoting enhancement and to disseminate good practice across the University
- 7.5 Associate Deans (Research) work with Directors of Studies (Doctoral) to ensure that any action specified by UDSC is carried out.

Institutional Assurance

- 7.6 The SU and the Doctoral College collate emerging themes and key delivery metrics from SSLMs and the Doctoral Executive Council. These are used to produce an annual evaluative report, which is submitted to the University Doctoral Studies Committee (UDSC). This replaces the previous requirement for annual SSLC reports. The SU and Doctoral College may refer issues to relevant committees or professional services, as well as support the dissemination of good practice.
- 7.7 This report provides:
- Institutional assurance that expectations and quality standards for Doctoral student engagement are being met
 - Institutional themes and issues
 - Areas of good practice
 - Priorities for further action
- 7.8 Reports should:
- Be disseminated to relevant staff and students
 - Be made available to incoming members to support continuity
 - Be submitted to UDSC in line with institutional timelines
- 7.9 Where applicable, reports may also be shared with relevant external partners and committees.
- 7.10 The SU and the CLT annually collate key delivery metrics evaluating University processes for student engagement with QA&E, including Doctoral student engagement processes, and submits annual Quality and Risk Assurance reports to EQSC, Senate and Council. These reports provides assurance that

student engagement processes are operating effectively and in line with institutional expectations across all modes of study.

Integration with other Quality Assurance Processes

7.11 Outputs from SSLMs, triangulated with other forms of student engagement such as surveys, must inform:

- Annual monitoring of courses and programmes (e.g. [QA7](#) / [QA51](#))
- Department and Faculty/School-level quality processes
- Institutional thematic analysis of the academic student experience
- [Accreditation](#)

Review and Effectiveness

7.12 Engagement mechanisms will be reviewed periodically to ensure they remain appropriate, accessible, and effective in light of changes to the student body, modes of delivery and regulatory expectations.

7.13 UDSC is responsible for periodically reviewing the effectiveness of doctoral student engagement arrangements. This includes consideration of:

- Participation and coverage
- Responsiveness to student issues
- Effectiveness of reporting and escalation
- Student awareness of outcomes

7.14 Where engagement is not effective, improvement actions must be identified and implemented.

8. Roles and Responsibilities

The effective operation of SSLMs for doctoral provision is a shared responsibility across the University.

Doctoral Representatives

8.1 QA48 does not define the responsibilities of student representatives, which are set out in the University–Students' Union Student Voice and Engagement Partnership Agreement; references included here are provided for contextual purposes only. Doctoral Representatives are responsible for:

- Attending SSLMs
- Representing the views of the students they represent
- Raising issues relating to the QA&E of the doctoral academic experience
- Bringing forward ideas and suggestions for improvement
- Responding to items brought forward by staff

Staff Representatives (normally the Department/School Director of Studies (Doctoral))

8.2 Staff representatives are responsible for:

- Promoting discussion of forthcoming developments relating to the doctoral academic experience
- Responding to issues raised by student representatives
- Engaging constructively with ideas and suggestions brought forward
- Reporting back on actions undertaken in response to previous discussions, and explanation where action cannot be taken
- Completing action trackers, making the completed action trackers available to the Doctoral College or FDSC and disseminating the outcomes to the wider student cohort.

Doctoral College

8.3 The Doctoral College is responsible for:

- Advising on the consistent and effective functioning of SSLMs
- Jointly with The SU, collating emerging themes from SSLMs and Doctoral Executive Committee
- Disseminating student feedback as appropriate
- Jointly with The SU, preparing an annual quality assurance report of Doctoral student engagement in QA&E processes for UDSC

9. Good Practice (Non-Mandatory)

Examples of effective doctoral student engagement include:

- Representation that reflects different research stages, disciplines, and delivery modes
- Explicit discussion of the research environment and researcher development
- Clear action tracking demonstrating responsiveness and enhancement
- Hybrid and asynchronous engagement to support participation of doctoral students who are studying part-time or off-campus
- Institution-level thematic analysis to identify cross-cutting issues and good practice.