

Summary of responses to Question 1

Question 1: Is the *Code of practice* definition¹ of a research degree still appropriate? If not, how would you wish it to be amended?

	Numbers and percentages		Additional comments
	Number	% of total (72)	
			The next four rows provide an overview of responses to Question 1. The rest of this table summarises the comments and suggestions received, sub-divided into broad groups.
Total number of responses to the consultation	72	100%	Six respondents to the discussion paper did not comment on Question 1 or the appropriateness of the definition in general.
Number answering this question	66	92%	
Yes, the definition is still appropriate	61	85%	Many of the respondents who said they thought the definition still appropriate made additional comments and suggestions: these are shown in the sub-sections below.
No, the definition is not appropriate	5	7%	Detailed comments from respondents in this category are also included below.
Comments on the definition			
Please note that some positive respondents are counted more than once in the sub-categories below because they made more than one comment.			
a The definition is still appropriate; no changes suggested.	39	54%	
b Strongly held view about need not to compromise volume or level of research component, or to give any impression of lowering of doctoral standards.	9	13%	One respondent mentioned the importance of having a research degree definition that is recognised across the higher education sector to maintain standards of doctoral education across institutions. Another said that how student effort is defined (time, output, assessment, credits) is key to the balance of awards covered by section 1 of the <i>Code of practice</i> , that where such effort can be defined the existing definition

¹ ‘...it covers the PhD (including the New Route PhD and PhDs awarded on the basis of published work), all forms of taught or professional doctorate, and research master’s degrees where the research component (including a requirement to produce original work), is larger than the taught component when measured by student effort’. *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, page 4, QAA058 09/04.

			<p>should apply, and that doctoral awards should be mapped according to the definition. Another respondent suggested that it might be helpful to think of the traditional PhD route as being aimed towards producing skilled researchers and an output of 'original research'. The professional doctorate might be more likely to be aimed at producing skilled professionals and therefore a slightly broader concept of research output may be more applicable.</p>
<p>c MRes degrees should be included or not explicitly excluded; institutions to decide whether awards meet the 50:50 principle and <i>The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland</i> (FHEQ) descriptors.</p>	7	10%	<p>Three respondents highlighted the importance of the MRes meeting the 50:50 principle if it was to be included as a research degree for the purposes of section 1 of the <i>Code of practice</i>. Another made the point that it is for each institution to determine the designation of its awards, depending on the content and proportions of research and teaching.</p> <p>Note: The existing research degree definition was intended to exclude the MRes, as a 'taught' degree that prepares students to do research.</p>
<p>d MRes degrees should be explicitly excluded.</p>	6	8%	<p>In support of this view, one respondent said that excluding the MRes signified a clear boundary that reflects the differential characteristics of research-based programmes, compared with those that are primarily 'taught' but contain significant independent study elements. Another respondent referred us to the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) definition of an MRes².</p>
<p>e Importance of emphasising that at least 50 per cent of degree should be research and that the research component should be defined.</p>	6	8%	<p>Several respondents said that they would expect at least half of the degree to consist of research work. One said that they would expect significantly less than 49 per cent of any 'taught' component in a PhD but that it was difficult to find a precise definition that works equally well for the PhD and professional doctorates. Another respondent said that it would be appropriate to review the taught/independent research ratio as the current definition implies that it is acceptable to have just greater than 50 per cent as independent research in order to qualify as a research degree. The same respondent said that, given the range and diversity of research degrees, there is a need to extend the definition in respect of the time spent on independent research study and the original/significant contributions to knowledge associated with different research awards. Yet another respondent suggested that a national minimum for the 'creation of new knowledge'</p>

² www.epsrc.ac.uk/PostgraduateTraining/MastersTraining/default.htm

The relevant text states that the MRes is 'designed to provide graduates with a foundation for a career in research in industry, the public sector, or academia. The MRes can provide immediate entry into a research career in industry or elsewhere, or as an enhanced route to a PhD through further research'.

			<p>component (eg no less than 60 per cent of the assessment) be set for professional and practice-based doctorates. One further respondent said that their institutional guidelines for professional doctorates indicate that not less than 25 per cent and not more than 50 per cent of the total duration of a programme should be devoted to 'directed study'.</p>
<p>f It would be better not to quantify or give proportions for the research/teaching components.</p>	5	7%	<p>One respondent said it is academic judgement (in particular about the originality of the research), rather than student effort that determines whether a research qualification is awarded. Another suggested that the definition could be extended to include all degrees with a 'large' dissertation component. Yet another respondent said that defining a research degree in terms of components leads to the award being measured by the learning processes leading to it. This leads to a series of difficulties, the first of which is that the components themselves become open to interpretation, eg what is learning within a 'taught' context as opposed to within a 'research' context, when some elements of supervision might well be described as 'teaching'. In parallel, in order to validate the inclusion of some components, eg generic skills training in research degrees, some institutions take the view that such components must be formally assessed, thereby leading to discussion about credit rating of doctoral programmes. It might therefore be more reliable to define the doctorate in terms of what learners are required to demonstrate to gain the award. If this is the case then someone gaining a doctorate should demonstrate that s/he can make a contribution to knowledge. In summary, it makes more sense to use FHEQ definition of a doctorate (the doctoral qualification descriptor) than by defining a doctoral degree in terms of components.</p>
<p>g It is no longer appropriate to use the term 'taught doctorate'.</p>	3	4%	<p>The term 'professional doctorate' is normally the preferred alternative. One respondent emphasised the importance of all doctorates being equally recognised within the doctoral definition. They added that use of the term 'taught doctorate' can be, and is, interpreted in some other countries (by potential candidates and employers) as a doctorate without any research component. They strongly advised that 'taught doctorate' should not be included in the QAA definition. Another respondent said the definition in section 1 of the <i>Code of practice</i> was never appropriate for all research degrees and that it is difficult for many institutions to ensure that their professional doctorates adhere to the definition. This limits their potential as awards and their contribution to research in the professions.</p>

h Need to consider position of some professional doctorates, eg in health disciplines, and to be inclusive of professional doctorates generally.	5	7%	Some respondents highlighted the fact that not all current professional doctorates would be in alignment with the definition. Some suggested the definition would benefit from reference to other elements of some professional doctorates, eg practice-based components, rather than simply focusing on research and teaching components. Others said they count all professional doctorates as research degrees even though the thesis might only account for one third of the credit awarded. Those who commented on this point were in general agreement that the definition should be inclusive of professional doctorates. One respondent said the definition should apply to all doctoral awards, to avoid the development of explicit hierarchies.
i The <i>Code of practice</i> is more relevant for doctoral programmes than research master's programmes.	2	3%	Other institutions might agree with this point but did not mention it because Question 1 did not explicitly ask about the relevance of section 1 of the <i>Code of practice</i> to research master's programmes.
j Other comments/ suggestions from respondents who think the definition remains appropriate.	2	3%	One respondent also suggested changing 'research component' to 'the component consisting of investigative or creative work'. Another respondent said there is a general lack of understanding of the differences between a professional doctorate and a PhD.
k Syntax of the definition.	2	3%	The current definition is unclear because of the syntax of the definition. Although the specification that the research component should be larger than the taught component when measured by student effort was intended only to apply to master's degrees by research, the existing definition can be interpreted to mean that any of the research degrees covered by this section of the <i>Code of practice</i> should meet this criterion.

Notes:

Some institutions award credit for professional doctorates but not for the PhD (although 'taught' modules taken by PhD candidates are often accredited).