

Academic Framework

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ACADEMIC FRAMEWORK - OUR APPROACH TO QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ENHANCEMENT

1. PURPOSE

This Framework Document specifies The Institute of Cancer Research's academic quality assurance procedures for assuring and enhancing the quality of its postgraduate research and taught degrees. It contains links or file references for all relevant mechanisms, policies and procedures. It is approved by the Academic Board and is made available to the University of London.

2. INTRODUCTION

The Institute of Cancer Research has been a constituent part of the University of London since 1927. In 1995, upon dissolution of the British Postgraduate Medical Foundation, it became an associate institution of the University. In 1992 the ICR entered the Universities Funding Council Research Assessment Exercise and received higher education institution funding thereafter for the first time, with direct funding from HEFCE granted from August 2000. In September 2003 the ICR was officially admitted as a college (now Member Institution) of the University of London, and in 2018 the ICR joined the register of higher education providers with the Office for Students (OfS).

We offer postgraduate courses only. This reflects our status as a specialist cancer research organisation, working at the forefront of cancer research, and is integral to our strategic approach to education. We have a long-established provision for MPhil / PhD and MD(Res) students, and also provide specialist clinical trainees in oncology with education in the scientific discoveries that underpin clinical practice through the taught MSc in Oncology.

We partner with Imperial College London to deliver the MSc in Genomic Medicine and MRes in Cancer Technology. Through collaboration with Imperial we have also developed a doctoral training programme (non-clinical Convergence Science PhD Programme, entirely research) where students are registered either at the ICR or Imperial, but may be jointly supervised, and an intercalated PhD (iPhD) Programme.

The excellence of teaching and the world-leading environment of the ICR was recognised in 2022 with the re-award of world-leading specialist provider funding by the OfS. The strength of our research programme and the quality of training offered to research students is demonstrated by the ICR's performance in the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021, in which it was found to be the leading higher education institution in the UK for biological sciences, and second amongst all UK HEIs that submitted to at least two units of assessment.

3. CONTEXT

The ICR's vision is:

"We will transform the lives of cancer patients through world-class research and education, and by growing our impact on society".

The ICR's mission is:

"We make the discoveries that defeat cancer".

The ICR's strategy has three pillars:

1. World-class cancer research: We will unravel cancer's ecosystem, overcome drug resistance, and advance diagnosis and treatment for patients – through world-class fundamental, translational and clinical research.
2. Inspiring tomorrow's leaders: We will empower our students and early-career researchers to become tomorrow's leaders in cancer research and treatment by providing the best possible education, training and careers support.
3. Growing our impact for patients: We will maximise the impact of our research for patients by engaging with industry, funders, donors and the public, building partnerships in the UK and internationally, and influencing the uptake of our advances into routine healthcare.

4. GOVERNANCE

The ICR is governed by its Board of Trustees.

The ICR's higher education activities are led by the Academic Dean, who is Chair of the Academic Board. The Board of Trustees has delegated to the Academic Board responsibility for all academic and teaching matters and questions of education policy, and for ensuring that the ICR has a rigorous and responsive Quality Assurance framework in place, and for developing and delivering the Education Strategy. The Board is supported by sub-committees for research degrees and postgraduate taught courses. The Academic Dean is responsible to the Chief Executive for determining (subject to the advice of the Academic Board) education strategies and priorities; the planning and implementation to achieve them; and the evaluation of education and training outcomes, including student welfare, and for effective quality processes that assure quality and standards.

The Academic Dean is supported by an Academic Dean's Team (ADT), which comprises two Deputy Deans (one responsible for Biomedical Sciences and one for Clinical Sciences), seven Senior Tutors and a Joint Course Director of the MSc (Oncology), with advice from an ADT Equality, Diversity and Inclusion representative. The Deputy Deans' responsibilities include ensuring appropriate supervision arrangements are in place; holding an annual formal review of each student's progress; welfare and discipline. The Senior Tutors' roles include working with the Deputy Deans on the recruitment of students and their supervision arrangements; recommending changes where necessary to the supervisory team, and the general and personal welfare of students. The Joint Course Director is responsible for the

academic management and leadership of the MSc in Oncology and associated qualifications, and for the quality and academic standards of the course. The Joint Course Director is also responsible for the welfare of the taught course students.

The ICR's Academic Services directorate includes teams that are responsible for all operational aspects of postgraduate study at the ICR: admissions, progress monitoring, student records, administration of taught courses, student statistical returns, the graduation ceremony, quality assurance and annual monitoring, internal annual assessment, academic events and governance, library, academic systems, e-learning, and new programme development.

5. EDUCATION STRATEGY

The ICR's plans for meeting its strategic objective for education (our [Education Strategy](#)) are set out as Pillar 2 of the institutional strategy.

Delivery of the Education Strategy is supported by an annual operational plan.

Academic Board ensures the achievement of the key performance indicators monitoring the ICR's academic business. These are:

- Achieve the submission of at least 90% of PhD and MD(Res) theses within four years.
- Consistently achieve a 100% pass rate for PhD submissions.
- Register at least 100 students annually on postgraduate taught courses.

We also have aspirational targets to:

- Ensure that at least 90% of students registered on the MSc in Oncology exit with a postgraduate qualification.
- Deliver career support such that, following degree completion, 80% of non-clinical research students go directly into a scientific research role, and 70% are still in such a role three years later.
- Ensure that 100% of PhD students have at least one published journal article by one year after thesis submission.

Academic Board monitors the following metrics:

- The number of new PhD students each year (to ensure that this is maintained or, where possible, increased).
- The demographic diversity of PhD applicants at application, interview, and offer stages, against the broader UK undergraduate population.

6. PROGRAMME

The following degree programmes are offered by the ICR:

University of London awards

- MSc in Oncology (and Postgraduate Certificate / Postgraduate Diploma in Oncology)
- MPhil in Cancer Science
- PhD in Cancer Science
- MD(Res) in Cancer Science

The MPhil and PhD programme are open to both non-clinical (science) and clinical students.

7. KEY PRINCIPLES

The ICR's approach to quality assurance and enhancement is underpinned by the following key principles:

- the primary and ultimate responsibility of Academic Board, supported by its sub-committees, for the management of academic standards and quality;
- effective delegation to the sub-committees within their terms of reference, and recognition that responsibility for day-to-day operational management, individual student issues, and (for taught courses) course development lies with the research degrees / taught courses management groups;
- a commitment to promote an ethos of continuous improvement in curriculum delivery and management and the learning environment;
- engagement with students and, where possible, employers through appropriate representation, consultation and feedback mechanisms;
- the use of external peers as members of the Academic Board's Research Degrees and Taught Courses sub-committees, and in the approval and periodic review of the curriculum;
- the use of appropriate external and internal reference points, including regular review of our compliance with the ongoing conditions of registration with the Office for Students, and, for research degrees, the REF outcome and other measures of the quality of the research environment;
- the use of management information (quantitative and qualitative) to support our quality assurance and enhancement processes;
- the proactive management of the research environment through the structures for determining research strategy and research governance;
- regular reviews of policies and procedures against published best practice and those of our peers; and
- the use of plain English where possible.

8. UNIVERSITY OF LONDON REQUIREMENTS

For University of London awards, quality assurance is delegated to each member institution. However the University's Regulation 1 describes the mechanisms that must be in place. Key extracts, with paragraph references, are given here.

Regulation 1:79 requires each Member Institution to "... put in place quality assurance procedures which shall be approved in accordance with the arrangements made by its governing body". This Framework is intended to meet that requirement. Its component parts (the Codes, policies, etc.) are approved as appropriate by the Academic Board or the relevant sub-committee in accordance with the relevant terms of reference.

Regulation 1:81 sets out the information that must be provided periodically to the Collegiate Council. This comprises:

- a list of programmes of study – provided, in the case of major changes only, by the Academic Governance & Quality Manager (AGQM);
- a list of the general areas of research available for specialist doctorates and degrees of MPhil, PhD and MD(Res) – provided, in the case of major changes only, by the AGQM;
- a list of candidates to whom the ICR has awarded degrees (and any revocations) – provided annually by the Head of Research Degree Programmes and the MSc Course Manager;
- reports and communications received during the year from the QAA following its reviews and the ICR's responses(s) to these – provided, as soon as available, by the AGQM;
- an annual quality assurance report to inform the University Quality Enhancement Review – provided annually, via a UoL-supplied template, by the AGQM.

Regulation 1:82 goes on to require that these quality assurance procedures shall include provision for:

- The formal award of the degree, diploma or certificate to candidates for taught postgraduate and research degree courses and, where applicable, the award of degrees jointly with an institution outside the University;
- The appointment of examiners for the degrees of MPhil, PhD and MD(Res).

The quality assurance provisions which relate to these are the ICR's Academic Regulations, Codes of Practice for MPhil/PhD and MD(Res) students, and handbooks for MSc and research degree students.

Regulation 1:86 requires each Member Institution to make regulations for the foundation degrees, first degrees, postgraduate taught degrees, diplomas, certificates and specialist doctorates for which it provides programmes of study. The ICR's Academic Regulations governing taught postgraduate degrees form part of its overall Academic Regulations.

Regulation 1:87 provides that each Member Institution may make regulations for the degrees of Master in Philosophical Studies, Master and Doctor of Philosophy, and of Doctor of Medicine (Research). The ICR's Academic Regulations provide these.

9. OFS ONGOING CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION

Formerly, the ICR reviewed practice against the UK Quality Code. Now that the Quality Assurance Agency is no longer the designated quality body for higher education, focus has switched to the regulator's conditions of registration. The Office for Students imposes ongoing conditions of registration for all higher education institutions that it regulates. These fall into categories:

- Access and participation for students from all backgrounds.
- Quality, reliable standards and positive outcomes for all students.
- Protecting the interests of all students.
- Financial sustainability.
- Good governance.
- Information for students.
- Accountability for fees and funding.

Each category is broken down into individual conditions, and guidance is published describing expectations for each.

From 2023/24, the ICR's Audit Committee shall review compliance with these conditions on an annual basis, via an annual report provided by the Assistant Director (HE Policy & Research Operations). Academic Board will review evidence for the education-related conditions (A, B, C and F), including any recommended next actions to be considered in future quality assurance reviews.

In addition, on a rolling cycle, each year will include a more detailed review of at least one OfS condition. These will incorporate a review of regulatory guidance, practice elsewhere in the sector, and topics under discussion by sector bodies (such as practitioner groups of the Academic Registrars Council).

10. KEY QUALITY ASSURANCE MECHANISMS

The ICR uses the following key quality assurance mechanisms:

- clear authorities and delegations from the Board of Trustees through the academic committee structure, headed by the Academic Board;
 - the ICR Academic Regulations;
 - Codes of Practice for MPhil/PhD and MD(Res) degrees, and handbooks for the research degree students and those studying for taught courses e.g. MSc Oncology (and certificate and diploma);
 - monitoring of the academic key performance indicators (KPIs), which are developed alongside the strategy;
 - rolling programme providing for comprehensive reviews of all significant QA mechanisms, and annual programme;
 - policies and procedures covering all key aspects of the ICR's academic business (see section 11 below);
 - operating procedures that set out how key procedures are administered;
 - effective consultation and feedback mechanisms with students;
 - external input in quality assurance development;
 - use of the Annual Monitoring Exercise to continuously improve the quality of teaching;
 - clear criteria and a clear process for considering conferment of academic titles;
 - use of internal audit reviews as appropriate;
 - annual operational plan to secure implementation of the L&T strategy, with updates provided to each meeting of Academic Board and its sub-committees;
 - Academic Risk Register, linked to the ICR Risk Register, covering risks to the delivery of the Education Strategy;
 - external reviews and audits;
 - review of each education policy and procedure at least once every 4 years* or as required (e.g. in the case of the strategy or periodic review code of practice). Periodic review of each taught course, and of research degree training, every 5 years.
- Board of Trustees oversight of academic governance and the student academic experience via the Academic Board minutes and an annual report on academic standards and quality.

* Where only minor updates or no changes are necessary to a policy or procedure, this may be by chair's action, provided that the document is presented to the academic committees at least once every 8 years. Policies and procedures should additionally usually be reviewed upon first use. On each policy review, a decision should be made about whether the policy is still required, if it can be merged with another policy, and if there are lessons to learn from comparator organisations.

11. QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

The general academic and examination regulations governing the ICR's research and taught courses are held within the ICR Regulations document available at www.icr.ac.uk/studentpolicies.

Key policies and procedures relating to taught courses –including the MSc Handbook, and those relating to Validation, Annual Monitoring, Periodic Review, External Examining, Complaints and Disciplinary Procedures– are also available at www.icr.ac.uk/studentpolicies.

Codes of practice for research students (MPhil/PhD and MD(Res)), which include information in relation to the programme requirements and key procedures, are published on the ICR website, and are available at www.icr.ac.uk/studentpolicies.

The programme specification for the MSc in Oncology is available at www.icr.ac.uk/studying-at-the-icr/opportunities-for-clinicians/msc-in-oncology.

12. TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT FOR STUDENTS

The ICR runs a comprehensive programme of training for research degree students in general and transferable skills. These are subject to regular review (a review of student training needs was completed in 2019/20 and the next periodic review is due in 2024/25). Recommendations made by the review team are presented to the Research Degrees Committee for consideration and approval with oversight by Academic Board.

The ICR's taught course students on the MSc (Oncology) are all part-time, attending only one day a week. Their training needs beyond the course content itself are considered as part of the Annual Monitoring Exercise and Periodic Review processes. Part C students have a group tutorial at the start of the year where they discuss what training will be provided, and they are then encouraged to talk to their local education supervisor about training needs.

13. WELFARE

The Academic Dean and the Academic Dean's team are responsible for student welfare (See section 4).

Confidential welfare advice for individuals is available through an ICR-funded Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) and via Mental Health First Aid. The EAP is available to all students as well as staff, and has been chosen for its specialist student support. There is also a network of Wellbeing Advisors who are ICR staff, trained in this volunteer role as a first informal point of contact for issues including mental health matters and workplace concerns. This network includes Student Wellbeing Advisors who are in place to specifically provide peer-to-peer initial welfare support for students.

Support for students with disabilities is provided by Registry and an external provider, currently Equality Focus.

Information about welfare provision is made available via the handbooks for research degree and taught course students, on Nexus, Canvas and the ICR's website.

Careers seminars and workshops are made available to research degree students.

14. CAREERS ADVICE, INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE

For research degree students, this is primarily provided by the University of London's careers service and coordinated by the Learning & Organisational Development team. The Codes of Practice set out supervisors' and students' responsibilities in this respect, and the personal development plan is completed by the student with their supervisor to agree priorities for career development throughout the research degree.

The MSc Oncology is undertaken by those who have already made their career choice. It is specifically designed to equip doctors who want to specialise in oncology, and who are already in employment. Nevertheless, the Course Directors provide career advice where this is requested.

15. STUDENT CONSULTATION AND FEEDBACK ARRANGEMENTS

There is a student representative on the Board of Trustees, on all the Academic Committees, and on a number of other ICR committees such as the Clinical Academic Forum and the Library Users Group. Student representatives are also active on the Equality Steering Group, Race, Ethnicity & Cultural Heritage (REACH) Forum, and the LBGT+ network. Representatives are elected by the students, and committee training is made available for new representatives each year.

There is a Student Committee which is organised by the students and is used primarily to consider student related issues, and to arrange social occasions and student-sponsored career activity.

The ICR consults research and taught degree students on all matters affecting them via the respective student liaison committees. All members of the Student Committee are members of the Research Degree Student Liaison Committee, which is chaired by the Student President. MSc Oncology students are represented at the Taught Courses Student Liaison Committee. Terms of Reference and Committee minutes for RDSLC and TCSLC are available on Nexus and Canvas.

The taught course students receive an annual questionnaire covering all aspects of the student experience – the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES); research degree students are surveyed biennially – the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES). Both surveys are currently administered by Advance HE. The results of this are discussed with the student liaison committees and actions arising from the survey results are reported to the RDSLC or TCSLC, and the relevant academic committee. .

Regular, informal, meetings are encouraged between MSc Oncology students and the Course Directors / Course Management Team. These help ensure that MSc students are aware of wider ICR issues, and can raise concerns beyond any related to their course.

16. REVIEW ARRANGEMENTS

The Framework is reviewed by the Academic Board after each renewal of the ICR Strategy. Following Academic Board's approval, major revisions are sent to the University of London by the AGQM.

