



Status of the Doctorate of Business Administration (DBA) in the UK

The Doctorate of Business Administration (DBA) sits on the highest level of *The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies* (level 8 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and level 12 in Scotland).

The DBA is an award which meets the qualification descriptor for this level in full. All UK doctorates, regardless of their form, require the main focus of the candidate's work to demonstrate an original contribution to knowledge in their subject, field or profession, through original research or the original application of existing knowledge or understanding.

The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies are aligned with *the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area* (QF-EHEA) and their comparability with it has been formally verified. All UK doctorates are third cycle (end of cycle) qualifications on the QF-EHEA.

The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies are supplemented by a series of Characteristics Statements which provide more detail about the distinctive features of qualifications at particular levels of the frameworks. In the *Doctoral Degree Characteristics Statement*, the DBA is cited as an example of a professional and practice-based (or practitioners) doctorate, which are described as providing 'an opportunity for individuals to situate professional knowledge developed over time in a theoretical academic framework. As such, they have different structures from other forms of doctorate. They are often post-experience qualifications and therefore they are frequently the doctoral degree of choice for mid-career professionals. ...UK professional doctorates are designed to meet the needs of the various professions in which they are rooted, including: business, creative arts, education, engineering, law, nursing and psychology. They can advance professional practice or use practice as a legitimate research method.' Assessment of professional and practice-based doctorates is through submission of a thesis or portfolio, and in the vast majority of cases an individual oral examination.

In each of the academic credit frameworks in operation in the UK, professional or practice-based doctorates carry a total of 540 credits (equivalent to 270 ECTS), with a minimum of 360 credits at the doctoral level (where credit is used).

References

- *Doctoral Degree Characteristics Statement* (2015)
www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2975
- *The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies* (2014) www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2843
- *Verification of the compatibility of The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA)*
www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Verification-of-the-compatibility-of-The-framework-for-higher-education-qualifications-in-England--Wales-and-Northern-Irel.pdf
- *Verification of compatibility of the framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland with the framework for qualifications of the European Higher Education Area*
www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Verification-of-compatibility-Scottish-FQHE.pdf

Appendix

Descriptor for a higher education qualification at level 8 on the FHEQ and SCQF level 12 on the FQHEIS: doctoral degree

Doctoral degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- the creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline, and merit publication
- a systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline or area of professional practice
- the general ability to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge, applications or understanding at the forefront of the discipline, and to adjust the project design in the light of unforeseen problems
- a detailed understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry.

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- make informed judgements on complex issues in specialist fields, often in the absence of complete data, and be able to communicate their ideas and conclusions clearly and effectively to specialist and non-specialist audiences
- continue to undertake pure and/or applied research and development at an advanced level, contributing substantially to the development of new techniques, ideas or approaches.

And holders will have:

- the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and largely autonomous initiative in complex and unpredictable situations, in professional or equivalent environments.

Doctoral Degree Characteristics Statement

The main characteristics of professional and practice-based doctorates are as follows.

- Professional and practice-based doctorates usually contain taught elements with significant lecture and seminar content, but final award of the doctorate is based on a supervised research project, projects or portfolio. In some programmes, the taught elements are assessed and either a pass/fail, or a mark or grade, is given. Such assessments may act as incremental hurdles for the candidate as part of his/her progress towards the independent research project.
- Research projects in professional doctorates are normally located within the candidate's profession or practice. In practice-based or practitioner doctorates the candidate's output involves practice-related materials. For example, in the performing arts, the output involves a written component, which complements the practice-based element (this may be shorter than the traditional PhD thesis, and includes both reflection and context), and one or more other artefacts, such as a novel (for creative writing), a portfolio of work (for art and design), or one or more performance pieces (for theatre studies, dance or music). In clinical practice-based doctorates, such as the DClinPsy or the MD, the research is likely to draw on clinical work involving clinical trials or other work with patients in the practical/clinical setting; the clinically based and academic research are then combined in the candidate's thesis or portfolio.

- Professional doctorates are rooted in an academic discipline as well as in a profession (education, engineering, law and so on). Candidates whose research arises out of practice alone, who are not working in an academically related professional field and who spend most of their time learning in their work environment rather than with the higher education provider would be more likely to complete a practice-based doctorate. In both practice-based and professional doctorate settings, the candidate's research may result directly in organisational or policy-related change.
- As for the subject specialist study doctorate, professional and practice-based doctorates are assessed through submission of a thesis or portfolio, and in the vast majority of cases an individual oral examination ('viva' or 'viva voce'). The provider's definition of whether the award is a professional or practice-based doctorate will have a bearing on the assessment criteria for the degree. In the assessment of professional and/or practice-based doctorates, similar to the PhD, examiners' criteria may include the extent to which the candidate understands current techniques in the subject, for example through demonstrating engagement with and use of research methods and how they inform professional practice.
- In the case of professional doctorates, successful completion of the degree normally leads to professional and/or organisational change that is often direct rather than achieved through the implementation of subsequent research findings.