



DoctorateHub

EMPOWERING THE DOCTORAL RESEARCHER IN YOU

Internal Quality Assurance Policy

**Submitted to the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority
in partial fulfilment of the Higher Education Institution provider license application**

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Table of Content

1	Policy for internal quality assurance.....	5
1.1	Introduction to DoctorateHub.....	5
1.1.1	Mission Statement.....	6
1.1.2	Philosophy and Vision.....	6
1.1.3	Strategic Goals.....	6
1.2	The quality assurance system.....	6
1.2.1	Institutional Planning.....	6
1.2.2	Institutional Intelligence.....	7
1.2.3	Risk Management.....	7
1.2.4	Quality Enhancement Approach.....	8
1.2.5	Quality Assurance and Institutional Effectiveness Manual.....	8
1.3	Organization Structure.....	9
1.3.1	The Head of Institution.....	10
1.3.2	The Head of Schools.....	10
1.3.3	The Head of Programmes.....	11
1.3.4	The Head of Learning.....	12
1.3.5	The Head of Quality and Governance.....	13
1.3.6	The Board of Studies.....	14
1.3.7	Student Representation and Representatives.....	14
1.4	Policies, Procedures and Documentation.....	14
1.4.1	Relation between research and learning & teaching.....	15
1.4.2	Academic integrity and freedom.....	15
1.4.3	Technical Infrastructure.....	15
1.4.4	Intolerance, discrimination and harrasment.....	15
2	Institutional probity.....	16
3	Design and approval of doctoral programmes.....	17
3.1	Doctoral programmes target groups.....	17
3.2	General learning outcomes.....	17
3.3	Design approach.....	17
3.4	Start-to-end Doctoral Programme Structure.....	18
3.5	Curricula Composition.....	20
3.6	Extension Tracks.....	21
3.7	Mode of Delivery.....	22
3.8	Staff roles and responsibilities.....	22
3.9	Staff qualification.....	24
3.10	Programme and faculty approval process.....	24
3.11	Internal and external engagement in the programme design and improvement ...	24
4	Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment.....	25
4.1	Pedagogic Approach.....	25
4.1.1	Use of scientific inquiry as the principle pedagogical approach.....	25
4.1.2	Learning through and from exposure.....	25
4.1.3	Learning through constant engagement with the literature.....	26
4.1.4	Learning from Research Scoping Lectures.....	26
4.2	Curricula Delivery.....	26

4.2.1	Modes of study	27
4.2.2	The Weekly Study Cycle	27
4.3	Assessment Approach	28
4.3.1	Use of Written Formative and Summative Feedback	28
4.3.2	Use of Oral Formative and Summative Feedback	29
4.4	Grading Metrics used: 'Pass' or 'No-pass'	29
4.5	Oral Assessments at Module End for Further Progression (or Retention)	30
4.6	Thesis Assessment and Viva Voce	30
4.6.1	Composition of Examination team	30
4.6.2	The Thesis Assessment Process	31
4.7	The Viva Voce Final Examination Process	31
4.7.1	Purpose	31
4.7.2	Procedure	31
4.7.3	Outcome	32
5	Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	33
5.1	Admissions	33
5.2	Regular Admission	33
5.3	Transfer Admission	33
5.4	Advanced Standing	33
5.5	Recognition of Prior Learning	34
5.6	Admission and Intake	34
5.7	Identity verification	34
5.8	Student Records	35
5.9	Recognition of accomplishments	35
5.9.1	At the Module level	35
5.9.2	At the programme level	35
5.10	Graduation	35
5.10.1	Submission of the Thesis	36
5.10.2	Issuing of the degree	36
5.10.3	Degree Awarding Ceremonies	36
6	Teaching staff	37
6.1	Faculty Composition	37
6.2	Faculty Roles	37
6.3	Faculty Recruitment & Selection Criteria	38
6.3.1	Faculty	38
6.3.2	Subject matter experts	39
6.4	Appointment, Compensation, Promotion and Contract Renewal	39
6.5	Faculty Preparation	39
6.6	Faculty Support	40
6.7	Professional Staff Qualifications	40
6.8	Professional Development	40
6.9	Evaluation	41
7	Learning resources and student support	42
7.1	Learning Resources	42
7.1.1	Instructional Resources	42
7.1.2	Learning Materials and Library services	42

7.1.3	Virtual Learning Environment.....	42
7.2	Student Support.....	43
7.3	Interaction and Communication.....	44
7.4	Complementary Student Support Services.....	45
7.5	Scholarships.....	45
7.6	Student Behaviour and Academic Integrity.....	45
7.7	Misbehaviour or breach of the academic integrity.....	45
7.8	Plagiarism.....	46
7.9	Student complaints and appeals.....	46
8	Information management.....	47
8.1	Data collected.....	47
8.2	Data storage.....	47
8.3	Long term records.....	47
9	Public information.....	48
10	Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes.....	49
10.1	Continuous Assessment and Quality Enhancement.....	49
10.2	Module Level Assessment.....	49
10.3	Course/Mentoring Unit Level Assessment.....	50
10.4	Club Level Assessment.....	50
10.5	Conference Level assessment.....	50
10.6	Thesis Supervision Level Assessment.....	50
10.7	Curriculum Level Assessment.....	50
10.8	Thesis Examination and Viva Voce level Assessment.....	51
10.9	Attrition Rate and Extension Track Level Assessments.....	51
10.10	Programme Level Assessment.....	51
10.11	Programme Performance Monitoring.....	51
10.12	Tracking and Archiving.....	52
11	Cyclical external quality assurance.....	53
11.1	Continuous external Assessment and Quality Enhancement.....	53
11.2	Periodic external Assessment and Quality Enhancement.....	53

Table of Figures

Figure 1: DoctorateHub HEI Organizational Structure Chart	9
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1 Policy for internal quality assurance

This manual outlines DoctorateHub's Internal Quality Assurance providing a clear overview about the processes, procedures and relations of the organisation. The manual adheres to the requirements of the Maltese National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education Internal Quality Assurance Standard. With this the manual addresses the following key requirements of the QA Framework:

Standard 1: Policy for internal quality assurance

Standard 2: Institutional probity

Standard 3: Design and approval of programmes

Standard 4: Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

Standard 5: Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

Standard 6: Teaching staff

Standard 7: Learning resources and student support

Standard 8: Information management

Standard 9: Public information

Standard 10: Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes

Standard 11: Cyclical external quality assurance

1.1 Introduction to DoctorateHub

DoctorateHub is a global learning platform for doctoral candidates that accelerates PhD completion, increases student mastery, and improves university doctoral programmes outcomes. Our key distinctive and competitive advantage points are:

1. Committed to doctoral level research education and how to get from start-to-end;
2. Clear 6-phases-25-steps based approach to get doctoral students through the doctoral journey;
3. Global pool of professors and investigators with decades of experience in doctoral education;
4. Proprietary technological platform designed for doctoral education;
5. Purpose-fit content and expertise which we have been developing inhouse;
6. Modular, stackable, and re-bundable system to maximise efficiency of service design and delivery;
7. A clear and transparent communication about what we understand to be high quality doctoral education.

By combining skills-driven courseware, expert supervision, and peer collaboration, DoctorateHub offers a personalized structured approach to completing advanced degrees.

With DoctorateHub, students gain access to academics with doctoral supervision experience and research expertise, and a structured pathway to support the completion of a degree. Unlike the self-serve approach of other programmes, DoctorateHub provides a guided experience with specialized content to enable students to make progress at their desired pace and achieve their academic goals.

DoctorateHub Ltd. was established in Malta on 29 March, 2023 with registration number C104998 and is a continuation of the DoctorateHub project that began in 2016 to assist doctoral students pursuing their doctoral studies.

1.1.1 Mission Statement

At DoctorateHub we provide doctoral students with just the right level of support they need to successfully finish their doctorates.

1.1.2 Philosophy and Vision

At DoctorateHub we know the doctoral journey, the do's and don'ts to it, what is reasonable and what is unrealistic, and what is up to the standard and what not.

We also have an in depth of knowledge and experience in educational technology and how to deliver education online at scale.

We are bringing both sides together to realise our long-term vision and to establish DoctorateHub as the global learning platform and Hub for the delivery of doctoral and advanced research education.

1.1.3 Strategic Goals

We are there to make the doctoral journey walkable. Thus far, DoctorateHub has already established itself as a global learning platform that provides access to academics with doctoral supervision experience and research expertise, as well as a structured pathway to support the completion of a degree. We broke down the doctoral journey into 25 bite-sized steps within 6 journey stages and we organised our content and service portfolio around these stages and steps so that our users can more easily navigate the community based on their needs and where they are. Our goal for the future is to perfectiate the pathway through the doctoral journey even further.

1.2 The quality assurance system

This section outlines the organisation of DoctorateHub's quality assurance system.

1.2.1 Institutional Planning

DoctorateHub's strategic and operational plans are mission-driven; include goals, objectives, performance indicators and targets. Divisional strategic and operational plans are based on:

- A review of DoctorateHubs's vision, mission and values;
- Analysis of all available institutional research and other effectiveness evaluations;
- A review of the academic programmes, modules and courses and its academic, students, and administrative services; and,
- Divisional performance against current operational goals, KPIs, targets, and risks.

The leadership conducts cyclical institutional planning checks on a 4 months base (8 months for part time) to analyse data, ensure regular and timely review and reporting, and derive concrete actions as needed.

1.2.2 Institutional Intelligence

The Quality and Governance division is DoctorateHub's official data source and reporting division, with the mission to maintain and provide systematic, timely, accurate, and reliable data on all aspects of the institution affecting students, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders.

Institutional intelligence is critical in improving the effectiveness of academic programmes. The quality assurance system in place provides accurate and reliable data and reports in support of academic programme planning and evaluation of programmes, modules and course outcomes, working closely with the Heads of Schools, Programmes and Learning. The findings of data analyses and reports are used to drive continuous improvement by assisting with planning and performance evaluation for effective decision-making and policy formulation, thereby improving overall institutional effectiveness.

Programmes are designed following study cycles of 4 months durations (8 months for part time), and data on performance, progression and feedback received is collected, preserved and made available to students and faculty alike. This provides the required level of institutional intelligence to assure the effectiveness of the academic programmes. Measuring individual, programme and organisational performance and developments over time frames of 4 months (8 months for part time) will allow to take actions timely, to implement improvements across cohorts, and to allow the various stakeholders to stay informed and to be at the same page.

1.2.3 Risk Management

DoctorateHub performs a risk analysis to identify the risks that would necessarily require objective monitoring, reporting, and the development of mitigation measures. Given the initial emphasis on online delivery, the following risks and strategies have been outlined.

1. Insurance: Having insurance coverage in place for various risks including human resources, liability, and cyber threats.
2. Health and Safety: Implementing policies and procedures to ensure the health and safety of faculty, staff and students during face-to-face events.
3. Cybersecurity: Implementing measures to protect sensitive data and systems from cyber attacks, such as network security, data encryption, and employee training.
4. Contractual Agreements: Carefully reviewing and negotiating contracts and agreements to minimize potential legal and financial risks.
5. Diversity and Inclusion: Developing and implementing policies to create a safe and inclusive environment and minimize the risk of discrimination, intolerance and harassment.
6. Budget Management: Properly managing the budget and financial resources to minimize the risk of financial instability.

The leadership conducts institutional risk management assessments at cycles of 4 months durations (8 months for part time) to ensure a regular and timely review and reporting, and derive concrete actions as needed.

1.2.4 Quality Enhancement Approach

The leadership conducts continuous quality assessments at cycles of 4 months durations (8 months for part time), which corresponds to the length of each of the modules and in consultation with the students, the faculty and affiliated academic partners, including regular student, graduate, faculty and staff surveys, to ensure a regular and timely review and reporting, and derive concrete actions, changes and improvements relating to quality and compliance.

The doctoral programme has been designed with a view of enabling all stakeholders, and notably the students, to continuously measure and assess the students' development and progressions as following outlined.

The doctoral programme consists of nine study modules of four months duration each (8 months for part time). Each of the study module starts with 2 months intense research training (4 months for part time) that is delivered either through advanced courses or through mentoring, which then is followed by a 2 months club journey (4 months for part time) that fosters the self-directed development of the student and providing written feedback and orientation sessions on a weekly base. Each study module ends with a conference event where the students are expected to present the state-of-the-art of their research project to a scientific panel.

The programme has been built in a sequenced way that take the student through the doctoral journey start to end, namely:

- Module 1: Research Objectives
- Module 2: Doctoral Thesis Research Proposal
- Module 3: Research Methodology
- Module 4: Data collection and engagement
- Module 5 Analysis & Evaluation
- Module 6: Research Conclusions
- Module 7: Writing up and Structuring your Thesis
- Module 8: Getting Ready for Submission
- Module 9: Viva Preparation

The assessment at the end of each module through the scientific panel allows for an objective evaluation about the student's progression and whether the Module Learning Outcomes (MLOs) have been met or not. Where the student's developments are insufficient to progress to the next study module of the research, the student will be asked to remain on the club journey and to present the research at the subsequent conference in 4 months' time again. For this purpose, and to handle such situations from an administrative perspective, a dedicated "Extension Track" has been designed (see section 3.6). The doctoral programme is therefore designed in a way that allows for a continuous assessment and quality enhancement as will be further detailed in the next section.

1.2.5 Quality Assurance and Institutional Effectiveness Manual

As DoctorateHub is growing, we will prepare a comprehensive set of Quality Assurance Manuals covering all of DoctorateHubs operations and serving as guides for continuous improvement. The four foreseen integrated manuals are as follows:

- Institutional Effectiveness Manual
- Risk Management Manual
- Integrated Quality Management System Manual
- Corporate Structure and Governance Manual

These integrated manuals will provide a framework for evaluating and improving the DoctorateHub on a continuous basis.

The latest versions of the manuals are available from <https://www.doctoratehub.com/programmes/qualityassurance>.

1.3 Organization Structure

DoctorateHub has a lean governance structure, which allows us to focus on the following critical factors:

- Identifying and implementing core processes that have a high impact on the implementation of DoctorateHub's vision and mission, and thus the achievement of its strategic objectives.
- The careful selection and assignment of competent staff and faculty whose expertise and skills can enable DoctorateHub's core processes and key activities to function effectively.
- The design and implementation of a process that deploys DoctorateHub's key objectives at all levels to ensure total institutional alignment.
- The development and implementation of core support processes to enable DoctorateHub to fulfil its various responsibilities to its students, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders.
- The development and implementation of an institutional effectiveness process that will be used for tracking, reporting, reviewing, and improving DoctorateHub's performance against its objectives on a regular basis.
- The development and implementation of a strategic planning process to translate strategic needs and requirements for the short, medium, and long term, as well as to guide activities at all levels. This planning process will take a comprehensive approach, including risk assessment and resource management.

DoctorateHub as an Higher Education Institution (HEI) is organized into four integrated divisions headed by the Head of Institution. **Error! Reference source not found.** shows the current organizational structure with 4 divisions, reporting to the Head of Institution. Each division serves a specific purpose and is responsible for a core area within the organisation and establishes a scalable structure for future growth.

The governance arrangements are designed to facilitate effective decision making, ensure accountability to both internal and external stakeholders and drive improvement and feedback through open and participatory process.

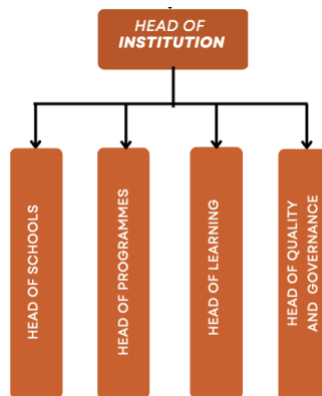


Figure 1: DoctorateHub HEI Organizational Structure Chart

1.3.1 The Head of Institution

The Head of Institution is the top executive and administrative officer of DoctorateHub. The Head of Institution can also be the Legal Representative of DoctorateHub. Main responsibilities include:

1. Strategic planning: Co-developing and implementing a long-term vision and strategic plan for DoctorateHub.
2. Resource allocation: Allocating resources, such as funding and personnel, to support the DoctorateHub's mission and goals.
3. Academic leadership: Ensuring the quality of academic programmes and overseeing the recruitment, development, and retention of faculty and staff.
4. Financial management: Managing DoctorateHub's finances and ensuring its long-term financial stability.
5. External relations: Representing DoctorateHub to government, business, and community leaders and promoting its image and reputation.
6. Student affairs: Overseeing student services, support and learning.

The requirements to qualify for the position of Head of Institutions are as follows:

1. Possession of a MQF Level 8 Doctoral degree.
2. A minimum of 5 years of experience in leading an organisation active in providing research, training, and capacity building services
3. Entrepreneurial experience, and preferably within a field related to digital and educational services.
4. Be fluent in English.

The Head of Institution is appointed by the entity stakeholders.

1.3.2 The Head of Schools

The Head of Schools is a senior academic position responsible for overseeing the overall operations and management of DoctorateHub schools. DoctorateHub will start with one school in Management and Business. The Head of Schools is responsible for ensuring that DoctorateHub provides high-quality doctoral and advanced education and research opportunities to students and faculty members. Key Responsibilities:

1. Lead the development and implementation of academic policies and standards for the schools.
2. Lead the hiring, mentoring, and evaluation of faculty and staff.
3. Provide leadership and support to the School Deans, faculty members, including mentoring and coaching to help them achieve their professional and personal goals.
4. Foster a positive and inclusive environment for students, staff, and faculty.
5. Oversee the development of new academic programmes and initiatives.
6. Promote the schools and its programmes to internal and external stakeholders, including alumni, government agencies, and the community.
7. Develop and maintain strong relationships with other HEI and universities.

8. Ensure compliance with accreditation standards and participate in accreditation processes.
9. Collaborate with other division heads, deans and administrators on DoctorateHub-wide initiatives, to foster interdisciplinary programmes and initiatives.

The requirements to qualify for the position of Head of Schools are as follows:

1. Possession of a MQF Level 8 Doctoral degree.
2. A minimum of 5 years of experience in leading an organisation active in providing research, training, and capacity building services.
3. Be fluent in English.

The Head of Schools is appointed by the entity stakeholders.

1.3.3 The Head of Programmes

The Head of Programmes is a senior academic who oversees and leads the planning, implementation, and tracking of a portfolio of programmes in accordance with DoctorateHub's strategic goals.

Principal Responsibilities:

1. Develop and implement programme strategies, policies, and procedures that are in line with the organization's goals and objectives.
2. Oversee the development and implementation of programme plans, including resources, schedules, budgets, and performance metrics, with cross-functional teams.
3. Use appropriate systems, tools, and techniques to monitor progress and assess programme performance to ensure that programmes are on track and meeting desired outcomes.
4. Identify and resolve programme issues and risks in a timely manner, and provide stakeholders with regular status updates.
5. Ensure that programmes are carried out with high levels of quality and within budget, and that they meet all performance, quality, and customer satisfaction targets.
6. Keep up to date on industry trends and advancements, and recommend changes to programme strategies as needed to maintain competitiveness and relevance.
7. Mentor and coach team members, and provide support and guidance to ensure that they have the skills and knowledge needed to deliver programmes effectively.
8. Promote the schools and its programmes to internal and external stakeholders, including alumni, government agencies, and the community.
9. Develop and maintain strong relationships with other HEI and universities.
10. Ensure compliance with accreditation standards and participate in accreditation processes.
11. Collaborate with other division heads, deans and administrators on DoctorateHub-wide initiatives, to foster interdisciplinary programmes and initiatives.

The requirements to qualify for the position of Head of Programmes are as follows:

1. Possession of a MQF Level 8 Doctoral degree.
2. A minimum of 5 years of experience in leading an organisation active in providing research, training, and capacity building services.
3. Be fluent in English.

The Head of Programmes is appointed by the entity stakeholders.

1.3.4 The Head of Learning

The Head of Learning is a senior position who oversees and leads the overall strategy, planning and on-going management of the virtual learning environment, learning resources, assessment and student support in accordance with DoctorateHub's strategic goals. Principal Responsibilities:

1. Lead the design, development and implementation of the virtual learning platform, fostering collaboration and community building and provide users with easy and efficient access to learning resources and technical teams to ensure the platform meets user requirements and business objectives.
2. Manage and oversee all programmes ensuring that projects are delivered on time and within budget, and that quality standards are met.
3. Oversee the design and implementation of training materials, including online training modules, e-learning courses and other training resources.
4. Collaborate with subject matter experts, faculty staff and instructional designers to create and publish content for the virtual learning platform, ensuring that content is accessible, engaging, and effective.
5. Develop and implement the learning and development strategy for faculty staff and students.
6. Develop and implement policies, procedures, and best practices for the virtual learning platform, ensuring the platform is secure, reliable, and user-friendly.
7. Stay up-to-date with new and emerging virtual learning technologies, and pedagogic approaches and evaluate and implement new solutions as needed to enhance the platform and improve the learning experience.
8. Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the virtual learning platform, and make recommendations for improvements based on user feedback and data analysis.
9. Provide leadership and guidance to the learning and development team, ensuring that all team members have clear objectives and are supported to meet their individual and collective goals.
10. Develop and maintain strong relationships with other HEI and universities.
11. Ensure compliance with accreditation standards and participate in accreditation processes.
12. Collaborate with other division heads, deans and administrators on DoctorateHub-wide initiatives, to foster interdisciplinary programmes and initiatives.

The requirements to qualify for the position of Head of Learning are as follows:

1. Possession of a MQF Level 8 Doctoral degree.
2. A minimum of 5 years of experience in leading an organisation active in providing research, training, and capacity building services.
3. Be fluent in English.

The Head of Learning is appointed by the entity stakeholders.

1.3.5 The Head of Quality and Governance

The Head of Quality and Governance achieves an overarching goal in the structure by overseeing the following activities:

Quality Management, Audit, and Policies

- Oversee the operations of the quality management system, including the upkeep of policies and related documents, procedures, and forms at all levels of DoctorateHub based on the findings of institutional research, reviews and evaluations, and benchmarking against best local and international practises for the promotion of excellence in learning, teaching, research, and community engagement.
- Oversee external and internal quality management audits and review audit outcomes and reports, management responses to audit findings, and corrective and preventive action implementation.
- Review, recommend, and report on customer complaints, noncompliance, and nonconformity incidents, as well as other issues raised by any HEI stakeholder regarding the efficiency and effectiveness of DoctorateHub's quality and risk management system.
- Create and implement a system for measuring and improving key stakeholders' satisfaction with HEI services and programmes.

Accreditation and Licensing

- Lead, plan, coordinate, and evaluate the ongoing accreditation preparedness structure and activities in collaboration with the Head of Programmes and the Head of Learning.
- Act as an accreditation expert resource, advising DoctorateHub on how to obtain and maintain accreditation and licences.
- Coordinate accreditation and licencing follow-up and ongoing deliverables preparation and execution.

Strategy and Performance

- Advise and support DoctorateHub management in the development, review, and updating of strategic priorities and plans based on institutional research results that align with DoctorateHub's mission and the best interests of the various stakeholders and include goals, objectives, performance indicators, and targets that are linked to the institutional budget.
- Review and report on the execution of the strategic plan and operational targets on a regular basis.
- Assist and advise the institution management in the development, review, and updating of a risk management plan that defines various sources of risk, assesses their severity, and identifies strategies to avoid, reduce, or mitigate them.
- Create a written record of the planning policies and processes.

Institutional Intelligence

- Develop and maintain a system of institutional research, which provides DoctorateHub with the capability to determine whether the objectives of its academic, student, and administrative service units, and the learning outcomes of its academic programmes and courses, are being met.
- Collect and analyze the KPIs-related data across DoctorateHub's systems and develop survey instruments to support the information needs and requirements of DoctorateHub's internal and external stakeholders.
- Provide DoctorateHub management with data and information that support institutional planning, policy formation and decision-making.

- Provide the Ministry of Further and Higher Education Agency (MFHEA) with the required data and information related to DoctorateHub ranking.
- Support faculty and staff in submitting to local, regional, and international awards.
- Maintain an institutional intelligence data repository, share methodologies and research results, and monitor trends.

The requirements to qualify for the position of Head of Quality and Governance are as follows:

1. Possession of a MQF Level 8 Doctoral degree.
2. A minimum of 5 years of experience in leading an organisation active in providing research, training, and capacity building services.
3. Be fluent in English.

The Head of Quality and Governance is appointed by the entity stakeholders.

1.3.6 The Board of Studies

The purpose of the Board of Studies is to collect and integrate feedback from students and faculty alike with a view of fostering a constant improvement of processes, practices and resources. The Board of Studies is composed of the Institution's Heads, as well as at least two faculty members and two students. The board can also include representatives from affiliated academic providers and delivery partners. The board of studies will meet regularly, e.g. at least once per term, and proper policies, procedures and documentations will be developed as the DoctorateHub operations will take up.

1.3.7 Student Representation and Representatives

Students participate in the process through the Board of Studies where they have the freedom to express their views on all matters of interest to them:

- Students are involved to provide feedback on issues pertaining to their studies through their students rep(s).
- Students are given opportunities to express their feedback through various evaluation surveys conducted at the end of each module and annually.
- Students also have communication channels and platforms, such as DoctorateHub Degree Programmes Club.

1.4 Policies, Procedures and Documentation

DoctorateHub develops, maintains, and implements policies and procedures related to its academic, professional and support activities in line with the standards for Accreditation from MFHEA. Division Heads, Deans and Faculty members are involved to a significant extent in the formulation and review of institutional policies and the strategic planning process which affect the academic and professional welfare of DoctorateHub. The following will briefly outline some of the key strategic procedures.

1.4.1 Relation between research and learning & teaching

DoctorateHub is focused on providing research education at MQF Level 8. Therefore, research is deeply rooted in any teaching and learning activity and as detailed in section 4 of this manual that covers DoctorateHub's pedagogical methods.

1.4.2 Academic integrity and freedom

DoctorateHub has put in place procedures for ensuring academic integrity and freedom, and for ensuring against academic fraud as covered in section 7 of this manual.

1.4.3 Technical Infrastructure

DoctorateHub has put in place procedures for ensuring the integrity, reliability, suitability and continuous availability of the technological infrastructure, including for verifying the identity of all enrolled students and as detailed in section 7 of this manual.

1.4.4 Intolerance, discrimination and harrasment

DoctorateHub has put in place procedures for ensuring against intolerance of any kind or discrimination against the students or staff and as detailed in sections 6 and 7 of this manual.

2 Institutional probity

The legal and juridical representation of DoctorateHub is vested in the Head of Institution.

Financial means and uses have been detailed and forecasted for a 5-year timeframe, under the supervision of our acting CTO. Annual audited accounts, annual financial statements, and regular budget plans will be provided in accordance with Maltese national regulations.

Head positions are appointed using the criteria outlined in Section 1 of this manual. Faculty and mentoring positions are selected using the criteria outlined in Section 7 of this manual.

3 Design and approval of doctoral programmes

3.1 Doctoral programmes target groups

DoctorateHub's doctoral programmes are designed for individuals seeking doctoral academic credentials for a career in the field of the research study that they will be conducting as their doctoral research project.

3.2 General learning outcomes

At the subject level the students will gain an in-depths and state-of-the-art knowledge in the field of the selected scientific research project.

At the degree level the students will possess the knowledge on how to undertake scientific research.

At the skills level students will learn how to identify, frame and problematize research questions, identify relevant and related research, set up the research instruments and methods, collect and analyse the data, critically review and discuss the literature against the collected data; and derive, formulate, present, and defend the conclusions obtained from their scientific research.

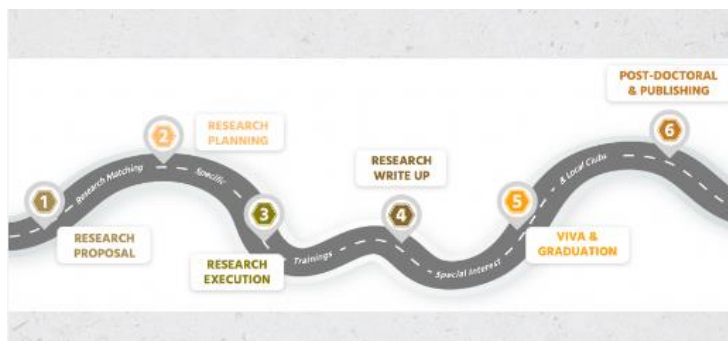
At the experience level students will learn on how to conduct independent scientific research. They will demonstrate expertise in critical evaluations and analysis with incomplete or limited information to understand problems in new or unfamiliar environments, to explain why and how these problems exist, why they have not been resolved thus far, and what the options of resolving them would be.

3.3 Design approach

The design approach of programmes follows the principles of DoctorateHub's system architecture and process model.

Start-to-end design

DoctorateHub is a global learning platform that is committed to doctoral level research education and how to get from start-to-end. The start-to-end approach is broken down into a clear 6-phases-25-steps based approach to get doctoral students through the doctoral journey. All doctoral programmes are therefore designed around this 6-phases-25-steps based approach.



Maximisation of exposure and scientific inquiry

Programmes are also designed around DoctorateHub's pedagogic approach that thrives for maximising students' exposure and opportunities to engage into scientific enquiry with DoctorateHub's global pool of professors and investigators with decades of experience in doctoral education.

Our mentor team

 Dr. Andreas Meiszner DOCTORAL MENTOR AUTHOR COACH OFFICE	 Prof. Dr. Boštjan Gomisek DOCTORAL MENTOR AUTHOR COACH OFFICE	 Prof. Dr. Steven McCabe DOCTORAL MENTOR AUTHOR COACH OFFICE
 Prof. Dr. Valerie Lindsay DOCTORAL MENTOR COACH	 Prof. Dr. Michel Rod DOCTORAL MENTOR COACH	 Prof. Dr. Nicholas Ashill DOCTORAL MENTOR COACH
 Prof. Dr. Rodrigo Lozano DOCTORAL MENTOR COACH	 Prof. Dr. Matev2 Bren DOCTORAL MENTOR COACH	 Prof. Dr. Kevin Boeh DOCTORAL MENTOR COACH

Combining start-to-end with exposure and scientific inquiry

DoctorateHub's proprietary technological platform is designed to combine the start-to-end learning pathway with targeted exposure and scientific inquiry. By combining skills-driven courseware, expert supervision, and peer collaboration, DoctorateHub offers a personalized structured approach to completing advanced degrees.

Start-to-end support draws on the purpose-fit content and expertise which DoctorateHub has been developing inhouse. This content is delivered through training courses.

This innhouse made content is complemented by specific expertise learning resources that is designed and delivered through DoctorateHub's global pool of professors and investigators. This content is delivered through 1-on-1 mentoring.

The DoctorateHub system architecture enables the combination and integration of process-driven support provided by DoctorateHub core faculty and specific expertise training designed and delivered by DoctorateHub's global pool of professors and investigators, resulting in a modular, stackable, and re-bundable system that maximises efficiency of service design and delivery. With this we can assure that doctoral research students are optimally covered on both, the start-to-end learning pathway, as well as in the specific needs that derive from a respective research topic and / or methods.

3.4 Start-to-end Doctoral Programme Structure

DoctorateHub degree programmes are 3-year online doctoral programmes (6 years for part time) that provide research and advanced training on how to plan and conduct research in the chosen field of specialisation.

Each of the three years of the programme has a distinct focus. Year one (1 & 2 for part time) of the programme is a probationary year in which the research project is developed. The emphasis in year two (3 & 4 for part time) will be on conducting research. Year three (5 & 6 for part time) is dedicated to completing the thesis and preparing for the Viva Voce oral examination.

Each of the three years consists of three study modules of four months (8 months over 6 years for part time), totalling nine modules.

Each of the study module starts with a 2 months intense research training that is delivered either through advanced courses or through mentoring, which then is followed by a 2 months club journey (6 months for part time) that fosters the self-directed development of the student and providing written feedback and orientation sessions on a weekly base. Each study module ends with a conference event where the students are expected to present the state-of-the-art of their research project to a scientific panel.

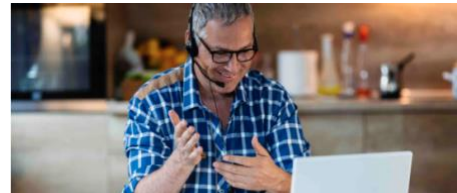
3.5 Curricula Composition

The programme curricula composition provides a structured learning pathway through the doctoral journey with clearly outlined control points three times a year (8 months for part time). Guidance and support are provided through a combination of advanced courses, research specific individual mentoring, and through study clubs.

The advanced courses provide tight expert guidance alongside a structured learning pathway imparting the students the general and transversal skills of doctoral studies, namely “Issue Identification, Problematizing and Research Question Framing” (Module 1), “Developing your Doctoral Thesis Research Proposal” (Module 2), “Drawing on the literature and engaging in critical analytics” (Module 5), “Writing up and Structuring your Thesis” (Module 7), “Getting Ready for Submission” (Module 8), and “Viva Preparation” (Module 9).



Mentoring provides tight expert guidance alongside the individual learning pathway of the respective research project, namely “Research Methodology” (Module 3), “Data Collection & Engagement” (Module 4), and “Research Conclusions” (Module 6).



The club journey periods promote the self-directed development of the student into an independent researcher. This period fosters peer-based inquiry and interaction, but also provides feedback from the club chair.



The conferences that take place at the end of the four months modules three times per year (each 8 months for part time) provide the control points necessary to make the necessary adjustments and to assure that the students stay on track.

Where the student’s developments are insufficient to progress to the next study module of the research, the student will be asked to remain on the club journey and to present the research at the subsequent conference in 4 months again. Likewise, students can also opt themselves to expand the club journey period for another 4 months period (8 months for part time). This practice will assure that each student receives the training and support for the exact stage in their personal development and the corresponding development stage of their research project. This practice also assures, that the students are provided the chance to learn together with and from peers that are at the same stage.

3.6 Extension Tracks

February intake			DoctorateHub intake cycles, progression outline, and transition into and out of extension tracks											
Module 1: Research Objectives	Advanced course	2 months	Extension Track	Module 1: Research Objectives	Advanced course	2 months	Extension Track	Module 1: Research Objectives	Advanced course	2 months	Extension Track	Module 1: Research Objectives	Advanced course	2 months
	Club Journey	2 months			Club Journey	2 months			Club Journey	2 months			Club Journey	2 months
	Conference	2 days			Conference	2 days			Conference	2 days			Conference	2 days
Module 2: Doctoral Thesis Research Proposal	Advanced course	2 months	Extension Track	Module 2: Doctoral Thesis Research Proposal	Advanced course	2 months	Extension Track	Module 2: Doctoral Thesis Research Proposal	Advanced course	2 months	Extension Track	Module 2: Doctoral Thesis Research Proposal	Advanced course	2 months
	Club Journey	2 months			Club Journey	2 months			Club Journey	2 months			Club Journey	2 months
	Conference	2 days			Conference	2 days			Conference	2 days			Conference	2 days
Module 3: Research Methodology	Mentoring	2 months	Extension Track	Module 3: Research Methodology	Mentoring	2 months	Extension Track	Module 3: Research Methodology	Mentoring	2 months	Extension Track	Module 3: Research Methodology	Mentoring	2 months
	Club Journey	2 months			Club Journey	2 months			Club Journey	2 months			Club Journey	2 months
	Conference	2 days			Conference	2 days			Conference	2 days			Conference	2 days
Module 4: Data collection & engagement	Mentoring	2 months	Extension Track	Module 4: Data collection & engagement	Mentoring	2 months	Extension Track	Module 4: Data collection & engagement	Mentoring	2 months	Extension Track	Module 4: Data collection & engagement	Mentoring	2 months
	Club Journey	2 months			Club Journey	2 months			Club Journey	2 months			Club Journey	2 months
	Conference	2 days			Conference	2 days			Conference	2 days			Conference	2 days
Module 5: Analysis & Evaluation	Advanced course	2 months	Extension Track	Module 5: Analysis & Evaluation	Advanced course	2 months	Extension Track	Module 5: Analysis & Evaluation	Advanced course	2 months	Extension Track	Module 5: Analysis & Evaluation	Advanced course	2 months
	Club Journey	2 months			Club Journey	2 months			Club Journey	2 months			Club Journey	2 months
	Conference	2 days			Conference	2 days			Conference	2 days			Conference	2 days
Module 6: Research Conclusions	Mentoring	2 months	Extension Track	Module 6: Research Conclusions	Mentoring	2 months	Extension Track	Module 6: Research Conclusions	Mentoring	2 months	Extension Track	Module 6: Research Conclusions	Mentoring	2 months
	Club Journey	2 months			Club Journey	2 months			Club Journey	2 months			Club Journey	2 months
	Conference	2 days			Conference	2 days			Conference	2 days			Conference	2 days
Module 7: Writing up and Structuring your Thesis	Advanced course	2 months	Extension Track	Module 7: Writing up and Structuring your Thesis	Advanced course	2 months	Extension Track	Module 7: Writing up and Structuring your Thesis	Advanced course	2 months	Extension Track	Module 7: Writing up and Structuring your Thesis	Advanced course	2 months
	Club Journey	2 months			Club Journey	2 months			Club Journey	2 months			Club Journey	2 months
	Conference	2 days			Conference	2 days			Conference	2 days			Conference	2 days
Module 8: Getting Ready for Submission	Advanced course	2 months	Extension Track	Module 8: Getting Ready for Submission	Advanced course	2 months	Extension Track	Module 8: Getting Ready for Submission	Advanced course	2 months	Extension Track	Module 8: Getting Ready for Submission	Advanced course	2 months
	Club Journey	2 months			Club Journey	2 months			Club Journey	2 months			Club Journey	2 months
	Conference	2 days			Conference	2 days			Conference	2 days			Conference	2 days
Module 9: Viva Preparation	Advanced course	2 months	Extension Track	Module 9: Viva Preparation	Advanced course	2 months	Extension Track	Module 9: Viva Preparation	Advanced course	2 months	Extension Track	Module 9: Viva Preparation	Advanced course	2 months
	Club Journey	2 months			Club Journey	2 months			Club Journey	2 months			Club Journey	2 months
	Conference	2 days			Conference	2 days			Conference	2 days			Conference	2 days

The use of extension tracks acknowledges the fact that research, including doctoral level research, by its very nature can only be planned and executed to plan to a certain extent. Delays are common and reasons that prohibit advancement are manifold.

The main purpose of the extension tracks is, therefore, to provide the student with a structured and supported formal pathway to develop the research project and thesis up to the expected standard.

The overall programme is designed in a way that assumes the “ideal case” where students would process through the doctoral journey just a planned within a three year time frame (6 years for part time).

Once a student is not advancing in that time, the student will be transferred to the extension track, which in practice implies that the student will remain within the same

club as they were at the end of the module. This will provide students with continuity and prevents that they are disconnected and alone.

The extension track will run for the same time as the other nine modules, 4 months for full time studies and 8 months for part time studies. Therefore, students can seamlessly transition in between the regular 9 modules and the extension track.

Students might be assigned to an extension track for the following foreseen three reasons:

1. Free choice

Students can opt themselves for being enrolled into the extension track whenever they feel that they need this additional time.

2. Retention

Retentions are used in the programme to ensure that students stay connected and can progress together while also progressing with their research and personal lives at their own pace. Where the student’s developments are insufficient to progress to the next study module of the research, the student will be asked to remain in the club of the current module for the duration of another four months (eight months for part time).

3. Conducting Viva amendments

Students will be automatically assigned to the extension track where the Viva outcomes have been ‘Minor Revisions’, ‘Major Revisions’, ‘Major Revisions and re-submission’.

3.7 Mode of Delivery

Advanced courses

Advanced courses are run for 8 weeks over a two-month period. At the end of the course students are then asked to present the outcome to their cohort, and for which the final days of the two-month period will be used.

The mode of course delivery consists of asynchronous and synchronous communication.

Asynchronous communication consists of written feedback that students receive on their weekly assignments and any questions that they might have. Cohort discussions will be equally monitored.

Synchronous communication consists of weekly video-orientation calls of 60 to 90 minutes length, as well as the final student presentations.

Mentoring

The mode of mentoring delivery consists of asynchronous and synchronous communication.

Asynchronous communication consists of written feedback that students receive on their draft and any questions that they might have.

Synchronous communication consists of weekly video-orientation calls that will be held during the mentoring period up to three times a week.

Clubs

There are three modes of support provided in the clubs: (1) One weekly 60 to 90 minutes video-orientation session at which students can present their work for feedback or just ask questions. (2) Once a week students can send in their work to receive written feedback. (3) Each club has a monitored discussion board to clarify questions and to interact with their peers. In addition to such services, students also have the option to organise their own group sessions.

Conferences

Conferences are virtual training events that, depending on the number of participants, last in between one to three days. The mode of service delivery in the conferences consists generally of synchronous communication via videoconferencing. Each student is given a 30-minute slot to present and discuss their work to two experts from the scientific committee. The presentation is capped at 5 minutes and followed by 15 minutes of question and answers. The final 10 minutes are then dedicated to work out the concrete next development steps.

3.8 Staff roles and responsibilities

The programmes foresee the following outlined roles and responsibilities of a scientific committee, cohort chairs, supervisors, course tutors, mentors, and club chairs.

Scientific committee

The programme comprises a scientific committee with expertise in the field of the studies. The scientific committee will be appointed as cohort chairs, as supervisors, to deliver courses, to provide 1-on-1 mentoring, to run the club sessions and to provide feedback, and to act as scientific experts in the conferences.

Cohort chairs

Students progress through the programme in cohorts of maximum of 8 - 10 students. Each cohort will be chaired by one member of the scientific committee.

The cohort chair will take the cohort from programme start to end.

During the first two modules the cohort chair will act as the first supervisor, and with the view of supporting the students in identifying a supervisor in the field of their research specialisation and to be assigned at Module 3 start.

For students that are on an extension track the current club chair of the module that the student is enrolled at will be acting as the cohort chair. Upon progressing out of the extension track back into the regular module students will be allocated to a new cohort chair.

Supervisors

Each student will be assigned one principal supervisor. At the start of the programme this principal supervisor will be the cohort chair.

As the research project matures within Module 2, the student then will be appointed one supervisor with expertise in the field of their research project. This supervisor will either be sourced internally from the DoctorateHub faculty or pool of registered DoctorateHub experts, or externally from associated partnering higher education institutions. This sourcing approach will allow for assuring that the availability of suitable and qualified supervisors for the respective research project in question.

Within the modules the supervisors will provide written feedback on the end of course / mentoring period presentations as well as taking part as an observer in the end of module conference presentation (see section 'General Assessment Methods').

During the mentoring periods in Modules 3, 4 and 6 the supervisors will, by default and with the exceptions detailed in the mentor role, also adopt the role of the mentor, and, therefore, engage with the student in oral and written feedback on a weekly basis.

Besides that, supervisors and students are asked to agree on regular touch points at which to discuss the progression of the research. In addition to this the supervisors can be contacted at any point in time and asked for written feedback on drafts and other artifacts.

Course tutors

Tutors will take students through the advanced courses with a view of allowing the student to reach the next development stage.

Mentors

Three out of the nine programme modules make use of 1-on-1 mentoring, instead of course based work. The reason for this is to provide the student with tight expert guidance alongside the individual learning pathways of the respective research project, and for which close 1-on-1 mentoring appears to be most appropriate.

By default, the thesis supervisor will be assigned as the module mentor. However, where a pooling of two or more students that are using the same, or a comparable, research approach is possible, a joint mentor will be assigned to allow for a richer learning experience, to earn additional perspectives, and to allow for a greater engagement with such peers.

Club chairs

Club chairs provide the students with their expertise and direction in support of their self-directed learning. The cohort chairs acts by default also as a club chair and provides support to their student cohort.

Within the extension track there will be a dedicated club chair that caters to those students that are placed on the extension track.

Scientific experts in the conferences

Two expert academics are sourced by the cohort chair from the DoctorateHub faculty or pool of experts registered with the DoctorateHub to act as expert evaluators during the conferences and to provide students with oral and written feedback on how to develop the work further.

3.9 Staff qualification

The principal selection criteria for supervisors and mentors are:

- a) Possession of a MQF Level 8 doctoral degree.
- b) A minimum of 5 years of experience in conducting independent research.
- c) A track record on the development and execution of funded research projects.
- d) A track record of experience in the supervision of doctoral level researchers.
- e) Teaching experience at doctoral level.
- f) Having held a tenured position as professor or principle investigator, with a major English language higher education institution.

In addition to the above, this programme also admits experts to act as lecturer or subject matter specialists to deliver courses, workshops, and other targeted training events in their respective area of expertise. Such experts would, however, generally be expected to comply to above criteria a) and to hold a MQF Level 8 doctoral degree, though exceptions might apply where the expertise is duly justifying for such.

3.10 Programme and faculty approval process

The DoctorateHub senior leadership team, which includes the Head of Institution, Head of Schools, Head of Programmes, and Head of Learning, agrees on the format of the doctoral programme from start to finish.

The Head of School and the Head of Learning select the faculty who provide special expert training in the form of mentoring or conferences.

The faculty who provide start-to-finish support are selected by the Heads of Programmes and Learning.

3.11 Internal and external engagement in the programme design and improvement

The programme design actively seeks to engage with students and external experts with the goal of continuous programme development and improvement, as detailed in sections 10 and 11 of this guide.

4 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

4.1 Pedagogic Approach

4.1.1 Use of scientific inquiry as the principle pedagogical approach

The programme applies the principles of scientific inquiry and follows the essential features of classroom inquiry as outlined by the National Research Council (2000):

1. Use of scientifically oriented questions
2. Giving priority to evidence in responding to questions
3. Formulation of explanations from evidence
4. Connection of explanations to scientific knowledge
5. Clear and logical communication and justification of the explanations

Students are provided with a pre-defined set of instructional and learning materials but will be expected to make extent use of (self-selected) information, such as scientific publications, databases, and other secondary data.

4.1.2 Learning through and from exposure

The programme also acknowledges the potential to learn as a result of exposure (Unger & Sloutsky, 2022). The programme is structured in a way that maximises the exposure of the student to a wide number of scientific experts, as well as to learn from and with their peers.

This is a tremendous opportunity for the student to gain perspectives and to benchmark their work against the one of their peers. This will allow students to gradually mature into an independent researcher, to learn about the do's and don'ts of scientific research, about what is reasonable and what is unrealistic, and what is up to the standard and what not.

There are 6 advanced courses, each with a duration of two months (four month for part time), that will be given by a scientific expert on the different phases of planning and executing scientific research projects.

There are 3 periods of two-month each (four month for part time) during the critical research preparation and execution phases where students will be assigned a personal mentor with expertise in the student's research project scientific area.

There are 9 periods of self-directed development in the study club, each period lasting for two months (four month for part time), where students engage with their cohort chair in weekly live video-orientation sessions and receive written feedback on their drafts.

Students will attend 9 conferences, one at the end of each of the nine study modules, where they will present their work to two experts from the scientific committee.

References

National Research Council, (2000). Inquiry and the National Science Education Standards - A Guide for Teaching and Learning. Available from <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/9596/inquiry-and-the-national-science-education-standards-a-guide-for>

Unger, L., & Sloutsky, V. M. (2022). Ready to Learn: Incidental Exposure Fosters Category Learning. *Psychological Science*, 33(6), 999–1019. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09567976211061470>

4.1.3 Learning through constant engagement with the literature

The nature of the literature review

The literature review process is not a one-time-off activity, but a continuous process that accompanies the student from start to end. What changes over time is, however, the purpose on why to engage with the literature, as well as the motivation for what one is seeking.

At the initial stage (around Module 1) the literature primarily provides perspectives and a theoretical underpinning about the wider research field.

Once the research problem becomes clearer (around Module 2) the literature is read with a view on the identification of related research, what is already known, and how this knowledge was created.

At that point in time (around Module 3) the literature takes on a crucial role in the scoping and shaping of one's own research project by building on related studies and therefore in a structured manner and to advance the existing state of the art.

As such, the literature guides the researcher (around Module 4) on how to conduct the research, to collect data, build on established practice, and understand what could go wrong and what mitigations might be taken.

Once the data has been collected the literature then serves as a mean to critically analyse the data against the existing knowledge (around Module 5).

While in the later stages (from Module 6 onwards) the literature takes on a less prominent role, there still will be a continued engagement with a view of benchmarking one's work and to stay informed on how the research field progresses. At that time the literature is perhaps less relevant for the doctoral thesis research project, but more relevant for the personal development as a knowledgeable scholar.

Module specific versus research specific literature

The students are expected to engage with both, module specific and research specific literature. Module level readings apply to all students and are geared to take the students through the research cycle. In addition to this, the students are also expected to engage with specific business literature within the field of their respective research project. The identification of research specific literature is an active element within the interaction with the cohort chairs, course tutors, mentors, club chairs and, notably, the supervisor.

4.1.4 Learning from Research Scoping Lectures

The DoctorateHub has been running research scoping lectures since 2017 and build up till now a repository with well above 100 recorded sessions (see <https://www.doctoratehub.com/webinars>) that cover a large variety of aspects of doctoral research generally and business related research specifically.

4.2 Curricula Delivery

DoctorateHub's teaching will be 100% online and student centric, combining the advantages of online collaborative learning and self-paced learning. Student centricity places the student at the centre of the teaching and learning process. Instruction take place in real time online, as well as in a flexible mode via the virtual learning environment.

4.2.1 Modes of study

Students can participate in synchronous or asynchronous online collaborative learning. Synchronous online collaboration occurs in live classes held in the virtual classroom, where students interact with faculty and other students in real time. These sessions allow for the presentation of new content, discussions, questions and answers, group work, and other types of collaborative learning activities between students and faculty, as well as among students in the class. The virtual learning environment, which includes forum spaces and communication options for faculty and students, supports asynchronous online collaboration. To keep students engaged, all programmes are designed to incorporate varying levels of collaboration, for which appropriate collaborative tools that support the achievement of learning goals are used.

Students who engage in self-paced learning use online course materials and resources as directed by the course instructor and the course syllabus to gradually achieve course outcomes by completing learning activities on their own time. Self-paced learning allows students to learn independently at a time that works for them, as well as opportunities to reflect, analyse, and communicate with their peers and faculty via the tools and resources available in the virtual learning environment. Web-based course materials, recorded learning sessions, and assigned reading materials are all available to the students in the virtual learning environment.

DoctorateHub respects students' information rights and learning expectations. Module requirements, expectations, outcomes, assessment strategy, and delivery approach are clearly communicated to the student within the respective programme handbook that is available from within each programme description.

4.2.2 The Weekly Study Cycle

To assure a smooth running of the programme a common work routine is adopted providing students with a clear weekly study cycle and thus keeping them engaged, on track, and monitoring progression.

Weekly tasks

Students will be asked to work against weekly tasks. During the courses these tasks are preformulated. For all other weeks the students will self-formulate what they want to achieve.

Weekly assignments / drafts

In completion of the weekly tasks' students will submit an assignment (during the courses) or a draft of their weekly achievement (all other weeks)

Weekly peer work

Students are expected to present and discuss their assignments / drafts with their cohort peers and to provide feedback to them. Doing so will support them in their progression and to allow them to stay connected.

Weekly assessment and feedback

Students will receive written feedback on their assignments / drafts by the course tutors, mentors, and club chairs respectively.

Weekly live sessions

The course tutors, mentors, and club chairs respectively will run one weekly live session at which students can present and discuss their work.

4.3 Assessment Approach

This section describes the two main assessment approaches used: student oral assessments and assessments of written thesis drafts and related artifacts. There is no automated online assessment, such as test-based assessment, at the program.

Oral Assessments

Each of the programme's modules ends with an online oral assessment in which the student needs to detail the achievements made during the module and provide evidence in the form of thesis drafts to be produced. Since each research project is unique and individual, it can be assumed that any cheating attempt would be detected.

Assessments of the thesis drafts and related artifacts

The drafts of the thesis are subject to regular assessments, therefore preventing substantial parts of the work to be copied in from other sources. Furthermore, the referencing of literature and the critical engagement are core competencies to be developed as part of the doctoral education. Therefore, [preventing] plagiarism and the assessment of originality of work are an integrated part of the training and development, and not something that is limited to matters of verification.

Students and tutors alike are therefore asked to make use of the bandwidth of available plagiarism detection and paraphrasing solutions so to develop the knowledge and skills on how to craft research papers in a professional manner.

As a mean to further avoid plagiarism drafts and/or final thesis documents will be run through a plagiarism detection solution, such as Turnitin.

4.3.1 Use of Written Formative and Summative Feedback

Written feedback is next to oral feedback a principle mean of the programme's assessment and used as part of the thesis supervision, the advanced courses, the self-directed studies in the club journey and at the final conference that each of the nine study modules features.

The focus and frequency of written focus is as follows:

Thesis supervision

Thesis supervisors will provide written feedback with a focus on directing the scientific research focus of the researcher. Such feedback should be obtained at least once a month.

In the course and during the mentoring period

Students will be provided with weekly formative feedback that they receive on the assignments and drafts submitted (detailed in Tasks 1 to 8 in each of the doctoral programme courses, and specified by the mentor for the mentoring periods) as well as on their final presentation (see Task 8 in each of the doctoral programme courses, and specified by the mentor for the mentoring periods).

During the Club Journey

During the self-directed club-based study period the students are asked to submit each week one draft of their scholarly work for formative feedback, which they are then expected to improve based on the feedback received until the subsequent week.

At the Conference at the end of each module

Students will receive written formative feedback on their oral presentation from the two examiners to whom they will present their work.

At the Viva

Students will receive written summative and formative feedback on their oral presentation from the two examiners to whom they will present their work. For further details on this matter, please read further below at the section about the Viva Voce final examination process.

4.3.2 Use of Oral Formative and Summative Feedback

Oral feedback is next to written feedback a principle mean of the programme's assessment and used as part of the thesis supervision, the advanced courses, the self-directed studies in the club journey and at the final conference that each of the nine study modules features.

The focus and frequency of oral focus is as follows:

Thesis supervision

Thesis supervisors will provide oral feedback with a focus on clarifying student doubts and to direct the scientific research roadmap. Such feedback should be obtained at least once a month.

In the course

Students will be provided with weekly live video-orientation sessions to clarify doubts and to listen to the development of their peers.

During the Club Journey

During the self-directed club-based study period students will be provided with weekly live video-orientation sessions (for both, full and part time) at which student can clarify questions, present, and discuss their work, or to just learn from the feedback provided to their peers.

At the Conference at the end of each module

At the conference students will need to present their work to the two examiners from the scientific committee to whom they will present and defend their work.

At the Viva

Students will be asked to present their work to the two examiners to whom they will present and defend their work.

4.4 Grading Metrics used: 'Pass' or 'No-pass'

The programme applies a 'pass' or 'no-pass' grading approach. At the end of each of the programmes 9 study modules, students are either admitted to the next module (see section 6.5) or will be asked to continue improving their work until it meets the examiners expectations.

At the end of the ninth module, the students will also need to pass a final oral examination, the Viva Voce (see section 6.6.).

4.5 Oral Assessments at Module End for Further Progression (or Retention)

Each of the nine study modules of the programme starts with 2 months intense research training that is delivered either through advanced courses or through mentoring. Students are expected to submit their work-in-progress for formative feedback once a week (each second week for part time). During this period, the students will receive one to three times per week formative feedback on their progression. At the end of each course and mentoring period students will present their key achievements to the group and cohort.

During the subsequent 2 months club journey (6 months for part time) a focus is on the self-directed development of the student to allow them to develop into an independent researcher. During this period students are given the option to submit work in progress for formative written feedback once per week (each second week for part time). There will also be weekly live video-orientation sessions (for both, full and part time) at which student can clarify questions, present, and discuss their work, or just learn from the feedback provided to their peers.

Each of the nine modules then closes with a conference where students are asked for a written and oral presentation of their research project. Each student is asked to present the state-of-the-art of their research to two members of the programmes scientific committee. These two members will then provide written and oral feedback on the development and maturity of the research with recommendations on how the research might be developed further. Students who attend the conference can participate at as many presentations of their peers as they want.

Assessment outcome: Retention

Where the student's developments are insufficient to progress to the next study module of the research, the student will be asked to remain on the club journey and to present the research at the subsequent conference in 4 months again.

Students that were resitting in the clubs will be assigned to a new cohort upon entry into the next study module.

Assessment outcome: Progression

Upon the approval of the scientific committee, the student is then admitted entering into the next study module.

Where the student's progress is going beyond one module, the scientific committee can also permit the student to directly enter into a subsequent module that is corresponding to the students current development stage.

4.6 Thesis Assessment and Viva Voce

4.6.1 Composition of Examination team

The examination team is comprised of one internal and one external examiner, and the latter shall be an expert in the topic of the research. In cases where the research is interdisciplinary, more than two examiners may be required to form an academic judgment.

The internal examiner will be suggested by the cohort chair and the external supervisor will be suggested by the supervisor.

The examiners will be selected at the start of the module 8, with the thesis being submitted by the end of the same module. The Viva Voce will be conducted at the end of the module 9.

4.6.2 The Thesis Assessment Process

The Thesis assessment will be carried out by the same two examiners that subsequently will undertake the Viva Voce final examination. The results of this assessment will be communicated to the student together with the Viva outcomes.

During the thesis assessment the examiners form their opinion about the quality of the research project and thesis document with a view to prepare for the parts that they would want to discuss with the student during the Viva Voce final examination.

The outcome of this assessment will be taken at the end of the Viva Voce final examination.

4.7 The Viva Voce Final Examination Process

4.7.1 Purpose

At the end of the programme, students will need to pass an oral examination, the Viva Voce. The purpose of this examination is to:

1. Confirm that the thesis is the student's own work.
2. Confirm that the student understands what he/she has written.
3. Confirm the student's ability to discuss and defend their research.
4. Investigate the student's awareness of where their original work sits in relation to the wider research field.
5. Providing a developmental opportunity for considering future publication and research options.

4.7.2 Procedure

The oral examination can take place online or on premises and is conducted behind closed doors by at least two examiners, with at least one being from another institution (external examiner) and an expert in the topic of the research. In cases where the research is interdisciplinary, more than two examiners may be required to form an academic judgment. The supervisor does not participate in the Viva but will be allowed to observe it. An independent chair will also be appointed to facilitate the oral examination.

The duration of the Viva can range from 1.5 to 3.0 hours. At the end of the examination the student is asked to leave the room and await the results of the examination and the two examiners will agree on the examination outcomes. Upon agreement, the student is called back into the room to be informed about the results. After the oral examination the examiners will write down the results in an examination report, including any change requests that they may have. The information provided within the examination report are the ones that are binding for the student and that the student will need to address.

Students will receive the examination report within 4 weeks after the Viva Voce.

4.7.3 Outcome

The following outcomes of the Viva Voce oral examination are foreseen:

1. *The degree to be awarded/Pass*: Immediate award of the degree. Students receive a notification from DoctorateHub advising on how to submit their final thesis.
2. *The degree to be awarded subject to minor modifications*: Usually minor typographical errors or minor editorial amendments for which the internal examiner provides the student with a list of the required corrections. The student is notified when the examiners have confirmed the modifications have been made to their satisfaction. Modifications are to be made within three months (6 months for part time) from the date of receipt of the written examination report.
3. *The degree to be awarded subject to major modifications*: The thesis is considered to contain limited deficiencies to be corrected for which the internal examiner provides the student with a list of the required corrections. The student is notified when the examiners have confirmed the modifications have been made to their satisfaction. Modifications are to be made within nine months (18 months for part time) from the date of receipt of the written examination report.
4. *Major revision and resubmission*: The work is essentially on the right track but needs some improvements before it can be finally accepted. The internal examiner provides the student with a list of the required corrections. The student also will be notified of their resubmission deadline, which will be set in between one to two years (two years for part time) from the date of the oral examination to submit their revised thesis. A resubmission requires a second Viva, unless the examiners believe there is justification to waive it.
5. *Award as a lower degree than the one submitted for*: This option basically means the research project was not meeting doctoral quality level and standards, yet the institution acknowledges the student's journey. Amendments to the thesis might still be required. In such case a Master of Business Research (MBRes) will be awarded.

5 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

5.1 Admissions

DoctorateHub admits applicants to its various postgraduate programmes with equal opportunities. All students are treated equally, irrespective of race, colour, nationality, ethnic origin, gender, marital or parental status, age, disability, political or religious belief, or socio-economic class.

5.2 Regular Admission

To be admitted to the DBA Programme the following formal qualifications must have been already obtained:

- A Master's degree (MQF level 7 qualification) obtained within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), or a comparable degree from outside the EHEA.
- A pre-Bologna 3 to 4 years degree from an institution within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) that grants access at the national level at the place of issuing for enrolment in doctoral programmes.

The applicant must be fluent in English, which prove needs to be satisfied through either tests or practical experience.

- For the case of tests the following minimum scores apply:
 - A TOEFL score of 550 (Paper Based Test), 213 (Computer Based Test), 79 (Internet Based Test).
 - An IELTS score of 6.5.
 - A Person Test of English (PTE A) score of 50-57.
 - A Cambridge English Advanced test score of 52.
- For the case of practical experience an employer statement shall be produced stating that English is a principal language at the place of work.

To be admitted to the programme students must submit a copy of their previous degrees, or of comparable achievements, together with their ID and a corresponding profile picture so that the DoctorateHub faculty can recognise them during video-orientation and conference sessions.

Upon admission to the programme the students will then be enrolled within a student cohort.

New users to the DoctorateHub platform will be receiving their login credentials. Existing users will just be added to the starting cohort.

Both, new and existing users, will be notified that they have been granted access to their learning cohort and where to find it. A training session will be organised to thoroughly explain the virtual learning environment.

5.3 Transfer Admission

There are no transfer admissions.

5.4 Advanced Standing

DoctorateHub does not currently admit students on the basis of advanced standing.

5.5 Recognition of Prior Learning

DoctorateHub does not currently admit students on the basis of recognition of prior learning, except for those detailed under the above conditions “Transfer Admissions”.

5.6 Admission and Intake

Process of Admission and Probation

Students who meet the entry requirements are admitted to the programme’s first year probation period (2 years for part time).

Within the one-year probation period (2 years for part time) students must have at the minimum completed the “Module 1: Research Objectives” and the “Module 2: Doctoral Thesis Research Proposal”. By doing so, the probation period is extended by another four months (8 months for part time) to allow for the successful completion of “Module 3: Research Methodology”.

The passing of the “Module 3: Research Methodology” oral examinations is the point when students have successfully completed their probation period.

Intake cycles and four months connection points

There are three intake cycles per year: The winter cycle starting in October, the spring cycle starting in February, and the summer cycle starting in June.

The programme therefore builds connection points across the various cohorts which facilitate the joint running of training conferences three times per year, as well as students to resume or recontinue with the subsequent study cycle.

Cohort sizes and composition

Study cohorts are formed at a standardized size of 8 students and might be extended up to 9 students per cohort.

From 10 students onwards, cohorts are split into two cohorts.

Resuming and recontinuing students will be allocated to the cohort corresponding to the module at which they are resuming or recontinuing

Pausing and recontinuing of the programme, including for reasons such as holidays

Students can pause and recontinue the programme at any point of their study. In the event of the recontinuation students will enter the programme again at the module where they paused. Students will be given the option to restart from the week in the module where they paused, or to take the module again from the start. For both cases students will be admitted to the next running cohort.

5.7 Identity verification

Upon admission to the programme the student’s identity is verified and a photo matching the photo on the student’s ID was added to the student’s profile. This photo will serve as a mean to identify students in the examinations at the end of each module.

In addition to this, the supervisor and cohort chair, as a regular student interaction point through the programme, will assure that the work is carried out by the students, since only the one who is

carrying out the research will be in the position to discuss it with the supervisor and cohort chair, respectively.

5.8 Student Records

DoctorateHub opens and maintains admission files at the point of admission. The admission file is considered a student's permanent file and it contains all admission requirement documents, and is kept in electronic formats. The student's file contains all academic records of the student during his or her period of study at DoctorateHub.

Student information is not disclosed to individuals or organizations outside of DoctorateHub without written authorization from the student. In emergencies, DoctorateHub can disclose student information necessary to protect the health or safety of the student.

Student information may be disclosed to local and international accreditation bodies when the information is needed to monitor, audit, or evaluate educational programmes or for the enforcement of any requirements related to educational programmes.

Under the terms of the policy, DoctorateHub has also taken measures for student's files to be kept in an electronic format for an unlimited number of years after graduation.

5.9 Recognition of accomplishments

5.9.1 At the Module level

For each of the successfully completed modules of their study programme students will be awarded a certificate as a recognition of their accomplishments.

In accordance with standard 5 of the maltese National Quality Assurance Framework (NQAF)¹, this recognition will clearly outline the amount of learning credit obtained in the module, the content, and the achieved learning outcome.

5.9.2 At the programme level

With the successful completion of the Module 6, students have accumulated 120 ECTS, which entitles them to the award of a research related Master degree, which in the case of the DBA - Doctorate in Business Administration Programme is a Master of Business Research (MBRes). This award will be issued to those students who do not complete the Module 9.

5.10 Graduation

The degree that has been awarded in the Viva Voce will be issued once the student has fulfilled the following criteria.

¹ Available from <https://mfhea.mt/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Annex-1-NQAF-Standards-with-amendments-to-cover-online-and-blended-learning.pdf>

5.10.1 Submission of the Thesis

The thesis must be submitted by the student to graduation@doctoratehub.com.

The thesis must be in a publishable quality that provides a consistent style, is well formatted, had been grammar checked, is not exceeding the stipulated word limit, has images and figures of printable quality, includes a complete reference section, etc.

The DoctorateHub graduation team will check that the thesis meets the expectations and will address any change requests to the student.

Once the DoctorateHub graduation team has accepted the thesis, it will be published with the DoctorateHub library, where it will be available to the general public.

A thesis might be embargoed for a to be negotiated period, if the student provides ground and evidenced reasons for such (e.g. business secrets, IP issues, Data Protection, etc.). In such an event, a shortened publishable version, or where this is also not possible, and abstract, shall be released.

5.10.2 Issuing of the degree

The degree shall be issued within a time frame of 3 months after publication of the thesis.

5.10.3 Degree Awarding Ceremonies

At periodic times during the year the DoctorateHub might organise physical degree awarding ceremonies at locations to be announced. Once students submit their thesis to the DoctorateHub graduation team, the team will inform students in the event of any scheduled ceremony to inquire about their interest to attend.

6 Teaching staff

6.1 Faculty Composition

DoctorateHub operates a freelance faculty that is composed of globally recognised full professors, academic subject matter experts, and community moderators, which will be tasked with the delivery of the educational services. Doing so allows for responding dynamically to service demands and enrolments.

6.2 Faculty Roles

Within the DoctorateHub degree programmes the faculty members take on a number of different roles, such as scientific committee, cohort chairs, supervisors, tutors, mentors, club chairs, and scientific experts in the conferences.

Scientific committee

The programme comprises a scientific committee with expertise in the field of the studies. The scientific committee will be appointed as cohort chairs, as supervisors, to deliver courses, to provide 1-on-1 mentoring, to run the club sessions and to provide feedback, and to act as scientific experts in the conferences.

Cohort chairs

Students progress through the programme in cohorts of maximum of 8 - 10 students. Each cohort will be chaired by one member of the scientific committee.

The cohort chair will take the cohort from programme start to end.

During the first two modules the cohort chair will act as the first supervisor, and with the view of supporting the students in identifying a supervisor in the field of their research specialisation and to be assigned at Module 3 start.

For students that are on an extension track the club chair of the current module at which they are enrolled will be acting as the cohort chair. Upon progressing out of the extension track back into the regular module students will be allocated to a new cohort chair.

Supervisors

Each student will be assigned one principal supervisor. At the start of the programme this principal supervisor will be the cohort chair.

As the research project matures, typically at the end of Module 2, the student then will be appointed one supervisor with expertise in the field of their research project. This supervisor will either be sourced internally from the DoctorateHub faculty or pool of registered DoctorateHub experts, or externally from associated partnering higher education institutions. This sourcing approach will allow for assuring that the availability of suitable and qualified supervisors for the respective research project in question.

Within the modules the supervisors will provide written feedback on the end of course / mentoring period presentations as well as taking part as an observer in the end of module conference presentation (see section 'General Assessment Methods').

During the mentoring periods in Modules 3, 4 and 6 the supervisors will, by default and with the exceptions detailed in the mentor role, also adopt the role of the mentor, and, therefore, engage with the student in oral and written feedback on a weekly basis.

Besides that, supervisors and students are asked to agree on regular touch points at which to discuss the progression of the research. In addition to this the supervisors can be contacted at any point in time and asked for written feedback on drafts and other artifacts.

Course tutors

Tutors will take students through the advanced courses with a view of allowing the student to reach the next development stage.

Mentors

Three out of the nine programme modules make use of 1-on-1 mentoring, instead of course based work. The reason for this is to provide the student with tight expert guidance alongside the individual learning pathways of the respective research project, and for which close 1-on-1 mentoring appears to be most appropriate.

By default, the thesis supervisor will be assigned as the module mentor. However, where a pooling of two or more students that are using the same, or a comparable, research approach is possible, a joint mentor will be assigned to allow for a richer learning experience, to earn additional perspectives, and to allow for a greater engagement with such peers.

Club chairs

Club chairs provide the students with their expertise and direction in support of their self-directed learning. The cohort chairs acts by default also as a club chair and provides support to their student cohort.

Within the extension track there will be a dedicated club chair that caters to those students that are placed on the extension track.

Scientific experts in the conferences

Two expert academics are sourced by the cohort chair from the DoctorateHub faculty or pool of experts registered with the DoctorateHub to act as expert evaluators during the conferences and to provide students with oral and written feedback on how to develop the work further.

6.3 Faculty Recruitment & Selection Criteria

6.3.1 Faculty

The principal selection criteria for the faculty that act in the degree programme and forms a part of the scientific committee are:

- g) Possession of a MQF Level 8 doctoral degree.
- h) A minimum of 5 years of experience in conducting independent research.
- i) A track record on the development and execution of funded research projects.
- j) A track record of experience in the supervision of doctoral level researchers.
- k) Teaching experience at doctoral level.
- l) Having held a tenured position as professor, or a position as principle investigator, group leader, project responsible, or similar, with a major English language higher education institution.

6.3.2 Subject matter experts

In addition to the above, specialists with track record of professional experience might also act as lecturer or subject matter specialists to deliver courses, workshops, and other targeted training events in their respective area of expertise. Such experts would, however, generally be expected to comply to above criteria a) and to hold a MQF Level 8 doctoral degree, though exceptions might apply where the expertise is duly justifying for such.

A strong record of research and scholarly activity, or significant professional experience in the applied discipline, is expected, but is not a substitute for the capability of getting students through the doctoral journey.

To provide outstanding levels of support to students, it is critical to recruit appropriately qualified and experienced faculty members, and this will be done in accordance with transparent, equal, and fair principles. Selection criteria include:

- Track record on taking students through the doctoral journey;
- Service attitude and willingness to cater for the needs of doctoral students;
- Ability and preparedness for constant re-learning and improvement.

The primary channels for attracting faculty will be through recommendation from one of the founders, faculty members, or students.

The Head of Schools has a clear mandate to lead the hiring, mentoring, and evaluation of faculty and staff.

6.4 Appointment, Compensation, Promotion and Contract Renewal

DoctorateHub provides candidates for professional staff and faculty positions with offer letters upon the successful completion of an interview and/or upon being shortlisted for the position. Following the acceptance of an offer, candidates are offered a freelance or employment contract, depending on the role and nature of the respective position to be filled.

6.5 Faculty Preparation

DoctorateHub selects faculty with senior profiles, relevant teaching and/or research supervision experience, and significant research contributions to their fields.

Tutor competencies are assured through three means: experience, profiling, and training.

Experience

Prior experience in online learning and virtual learning environments is a selection criterion for being admitted to the DoctorateHub faculty.

Profiling

In addition to this, the DoctorateHub business model is designed in a way to identify the most suitable and qualified tutors. The DoctorateHub global learning platform consists of two components: (1) degree track programmes, and (2) an open marketplace that provides access to educational community services (clubs, working sessions, webinars), training (courses, workshops, conferences), and mentoring (1-on-1 mentoring, in-residences, or Mock Viva) services. This marketplace is open to external service providers, who can build up their DoctorateHub profile and show through the quality of the service delivery their level of competencies and fit for purpose. The DoctorateHub will recruit

excellent performing service providers from the marketplace for deployment in the degree awarding programmes.

Training

Training is also made available via the DoctorateHub Faculty Club as the one stop shop where relevant information, learning resources and training offers can be found. There will be both, initial faculty trainings targeted at explaining to the incoming faculty the DoctorateHub way of work, as well as trainings targeted at specific development needs that have been identified at the point of intake.

6.6 Faculty Support

The DoctorateHub faculty receive academic, administrative, and technical support on the provision of the programme online/remotely via three distinct means: an online DoctorateHub Faculty Club, via videoconferencing, and via E-mail.

DoctorateHub Faculty Club

The DoctorateHub Faculty Club is the one stop shop where all relevant information and resources can be found, such as manuals, guides, policies, organigrams, training resources, and a listing of future and past events.

Videoconferencing

Videoconferencing will be used in two ways; first for regular periodic meetings (e.g. weekly) to discuss day to day developments, as well as ad-hoc meetings that are dedicated to specific topics. Videoconferencing will also be used in support of training events and the onboarding of new faculty.

E-mail

For any urgent or private matters Tutor support will also be provided via E-mail to facultysupport@doctoratehub.com

6.7 Professional Staff Qualifications

DoctorateHub staff are recruited and appointed on the basis of appropriate qualifications and experience with the best candidates selected by merit through an interview process.

The primary channels for recruiting new employees are third-party channels such as recruiting firms, online communities, and similar.

The Head of Institution has a clear mandate to lead the hiring, mentoring, and evaluation of faculty and staff.

6.8 Professional Development

Professional development is provided to DoctorateHub's faculty members by providing internal and external training and development opportunities, as well as allocating annual funds for attending conferences and supporting original research work.

Professional development is provided to professional staff in order to improve performance and advance skills as they relate to their specific roles. Some of these training programmes are delivered by outside professional bodies with expertise in professional development.

DoctorateHub will build a repository of training resources intended as reference guides to assist faculty members, staff and students in effectively navigating the Virtual Learning Environment that will be available via the internal dashboards and Faculty and Degree Programme Clubs.

6.9 Evaluation

The assessment of faculty performance is recognized as an integral part of the development of DoctorateHub. Its primary purpose is to support and encourage excellence by recognizing and rewarding outstanding faculty performance and to provide a basis for faculty members to improve and develop their careers. The outcome of such an evaluation is used to make decisions about promotion, merit pay decisions, renewal and termination of contracts and re-appointment. The timing for these evaluations and areas of assessment may differ according to the purpose of the evaluation; however, in general it tends to coincide with the end of each of the programmes 4 months modules (8 months for part time).

The Head of Schools has a clear mandate to lead the evaluation process.

The evaluations form a continuous record of the performance of each individual and aim at:

- Provide a system for assessing the performance of the faculty with respect to their student support;
- Provide an environment for improving the faculty teaching skills;
- Providing periodic feedback to the faculty on their progress on a module basis, and ensure performance records are available for each faculty member;
- Enhancing faculty development by promoting self-assessment;
- Providing the faculty with the opportunity to comment on his/her performance and provide evidence of performance in areas relevant to the school;
- Identifying and reviewing the areas that need improvement, if any, and plan for training and development opportunities to enhance faculty performance; and
- Providing evidence to support decisions pertaining to promotion, salary increments, contract renewals, etc.

7 Learning resources and student support

7.1 Learning Resources

7.1.1 Instructional Resources

Students and tutors have online access to the following instructional resources:

The programme handbook

The programme handbook that provides the same information as detailed in the MFHEA DBA Programme Accreditation Application Form document.

Instructional information in the courses, clubs, and conferences

The courses, clubs, and conferences provide individual instructional resources.

The DoctorateHub Degree Programmes Club and DoctorateHub Faculty Club

These two clubs serve as a one stop shop for students and faculty respectively and, therefore, also serve as a resource pool for instructional materials.

7.1.2 Learning Materials and Library services

The programme provides students with the module specific learning resources that are required to complete the programme modules.

With regards to research specific literature, students are generally expected to identify and source any material that is of relevance to their doctoral research project. The identification, sourcing, evaluation, and critical reflection of information is a critical component of doctoral level learnings and will be constantly practised so that students gradually will evolve into future ready doctoral practitioners that can engage in independent scientific inquiry.

In support of this, the DoctorateHub provides students with a library space where they can access trusted sources from across scientific communities, available from <https://www.doctoratehub.com/library>.

In addition to these resources, students might also be provided with access to subscriptions on an individual base, as and where required, to assure that each student will get access to the resources that their respective research project requires. Access to such sources shall be agreed on with the thesis supervisor.

7.1.3 Virtual Learning Environment

DoctorateHub uses its own proprietary learning platform that was designed to cater for the particularities of doctoral education and that consists of the following components.

Platform overall infrastructure

The platform provides students with access to instructional materials and learning materials, as well as access to the student records of their development and progression through the programme.

Students can use the platform to access the courses, mentoring spaces, thematic study clubs, and to live video-orientation calls.

The platform features a dashboard that allows for a holistic navigation through the student's own resources, as well as all available resources.

The platform also includes a communication centre which federates all discussions at which the student is involved at from across the platform.

The platform also allows students to organise their own discussion group sessions.

There are currently no specific tools/technologies to support students with special needs. However, as the platform evolves, this issue will also be looked at in more detail.

Advanced course infrastructure

Advanced courses provide the student access to instructions and learning resources, which are divided into tasks that students need to complete. Courses give students access to discussion boards and allow them to submit assignments.

Video-orientation calls are organised via a third-party solution, currently Zoom (<https://zoom.us>), with the access details posted on the discussion board and session.

Mentoring infrastructure

The mentoring board provides the student access to a discussion board and allows the student to submit assignments for feedback.

Video-orientation calls are organised via a third-party solution, currently Zoom (<https://zoom.us>), with the access details posted on the discussion board and session.

Club infrastructure

Clubs are very community-oriented, providing access to discussion boards, a directory for forthcoming group sessions, and highlighted learning resources within the DoctorateHub that are relevant to the club's focal area.

Video-orientation calls are organised via a third-party solution, currently Zoom (<https://zoom.us>), with the access details posted to the discussion board and session.

Conference infrastructure

Conferences are virtual training events and provide participants access to discussion boards, a directory for forthcoming group sessions, and highlighted learning resources within the DoctorateHub that are relevant to the conference.

Video-orientation calls are organised via a third-party solution, currently Zoom (<https://zoom.us>), with the access details posted to the discussion board and session.

7.2 Student Support

DoctorateHub provides technical, administrative, and academic support including counselling to students as following outlined.

Academic support

Academic support will be provided both, face to face and through dedicated online spaces.

Within each module academic support is provided in the first two months (four months for part time) by the course tutor (modules 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 9) or mentors (modules 3, 5, 6), and in the subsequent two months (four months for part time) by the club moderator(s).

The student's cohort chair is the primary contact for in-person support. For students that did not pass to the next module the principal person for in person support is the moderator of their current module club.

In addition to this, there are regular interactions with the supervisors to provide academic direction.

Technical and Administrative support

Technical and administrative support will be provided via two means, the DoctorateHub Degree Programmes Club and for any urgent or private matters student support will also be provided via E-mail to studentsupport@doctoratehub.com

Pastoral Care and Counselling

On a day to day base the cohort chair is the students first contact point. However, there also is an institution wide response to pastoral care and counselling and students can book video-orientation sessions via studentsupport@doctoratehub.com.

7.3 Interaction and Communication

Depending on the study format students and tutors interact as following outlined.

Advanced courses

Advanced courses last 8 weeks over a two-months period for both, full time and part time students. At the end of the course students are then asked to present the outcome to their cohort, for which the final days of the two months period will be used.

Asynchronous and synchronous communication are used for course delivery.

Asynchronous communication consists of written feedback on individual weekly assignments and any questions students might have. Cohort discussions will be equally monitored.

Synchronous communication consists of weekly video-orientation calls of 60 to 90 minutes in length, as well as the final student presentations.

Mentoring

Asynchronous and synchronous communication are used for mentoring.

Asynchronous communication consists of written feedback on individual drafts and any questions students might have.

Synchronous communication consists of weekly video-orientation calls during the mentoring period.

Clubs

In the clubs, asynchronous and synchronous communication are provided. Synchronous communication consists of one weekly (for full time and for part time) 60 to 90 minutes video-orientation session during which students can present their work for feedback or simply ask questions. In addition to such services, students also have the option to organise their own group sessions.

Asynchronous communication consists of weekly written feedback on submitted drafts (each second week for part time), as well as monitored discussion board where members can clarify questions and interact with their peers.

Conferences

Conferences are virtual training events that, depending on the number of participants, can last in between one to three days. The mode of service delivery in the conferences consists of synchronous communication via videoconferencing. Each student is given a 30-minute slot to present and discuss their work with two experts from the scientific committee. The presentation is capped at 5 minutes

and is followed by 15 minutes of Q&A. The final 10 minutes are then devoted to determining the concrete next development steps.

7.4 Complementary Student Support Services

To help students achieve success, complete their programmes of study in a timely manner, and provide them with a unique research experience that prepares them for becoming successful independent researchers and leaders, DoctorateHub offers a wide range of additional and complementary academic offers to all of its student community that is available through the DoctorateHub marketplace. These offers include special interest and local clubs, a range of advanced courses and workshops, virtual and local conferences and residencies, as well as extended mentoring and In-residence options.

All services provided by the DoctorateHub marketplace are available to all students, regardless of their programme of study.

7.5 Scholarships

DoctorateHub does not provide financial assistance in the form of scholarships or other grants. DoctorateHub will seek to form alliances with external entities whose mission it is to provide students with education funding in order to finance their study programmes.

7.6 Student Behaviour and Academic Integrity

DoctorateHub takes pride in keeping a strict code of academic honesty. This means making sure that the original writers of all source material are acknowledged. So, in all of their graded work, students are expected to exhibit proper reference techniques. Good referencing techniques foster academic writing confidence and aid in avoiding accidental plagiarism. DoctorateHub is devoted to providing the tools and resources students need to participate honestly and actively in the assessment process. DoctorateHub is aware of the difficulties students experience in this area.

Consequently, students will be asked to declare upon the commencement of their studies that they confirm that they will act honestly, ethically and professionally in conduct leading to the collection of data for research and to the submission of assignments, papers and other assessed work for the programme of study.

Students will also be asked to not copy material from other source without giving credit to the original source and proper referencing of that source.

Student will equally be informed that DoctorateHub welcomes a constructive, critical, direct, and honest dialogue in the light of scientific inquiry, probing and disagreement, but does not accept any form of discrimination, intolerance and harassment.

7.7 Misbehaviour or breach of the academic integrity

In case of misbehaviour or breach of the academic integrity the student will be given the chance to explain the situation, in written, to the scientific committee. Where this written explanation can not resolve the situation, the student will be given the opportunity to discuss the case with two scientific committee members. Based on these information the scientific committee will then take the decision on how to handle the situation and to decide about the consequences for the student concerned.

7.8 Plagiarism

Training on writing and avoiding plagiarism is an integral part of the feedback that students will be provided with. It is aimed at avoiding the risk of plagiarism and to allow for internal validation of students' work through their written and oral presentations.

Guidelines provide faculty with the expected assessment standards and include assessment structures that maximize student involvement and minimize the risk of plagiarism. In addition, plagiarism detection tools such as Turnitin help safeguard against any possible abuse of the students' code of conduct in this respect.

7.9 Student complaints and appeals

In case of student complaints and appeals the student will be given the chance to explain the situation, in written, to the scientific committee, who then will evaluate the situation on a case by case base and collect further evidence as required.

Where the reason for the complain or appeal is judged to be justified, the scientific committee will appoint one of its members to resolve the situation in close liason with the student and other parties involved.

Where the reason for the complain or appeal is judged to not be justified, the scientific committee will appoint two of its members to meet with the student and to explain why the situation is seen to not be justified. The student will, however, be given the chance to ask for a re-evaluation of the situation if there are further or additional information that shall be taken into account. In such an event the complain and appeal process will be restarting.

8 Information management

8.1 Data collected

Student data will be kept and includes the following information.

At the student level:

- Data on admission records, student details, proof of assessment.

At the faculty level:

- Data on student, cohort, module records, student details, including assessment results.

At the programme level:

- Data on the profile of the student population, including prevalence of vulnerable groups.

At the module level:

- Data on the course, mentoring and conference participation, retention and success rates.

At the system level:

- Data on students' satisfaction with their programmes, modules, courses, mentorships and conferences, clubs, cohorts and the supervisor.
- Data on employment rates and career development paths after graduation.

8.2 Data storage

All records are digital and will be archived with a third-party ISP. The services contracted with the ISP include the necessary hardware and software as well as online availability and redundancy systems to secure online services. In addition to this our development lead backs up both the database and the files, as well as the code, for additional redundancy.

8.3 Long term records

DoctorateHub will maintain, retain, and archive student data via digital storage by creating digital copies of the records and storing them in a secure digital repository via cloud storage services or an institutional server with appropriate security protocols. To protect the digital records, access controls, encryption, and regular backups will be implemented.

If DoctorateHub ceases operations, we will transfer custody of the student records to another reputable educational institution or organisation in Malta, or to a trusted third-party entity or archival institution, to act as a custodian for the student records. Students, alumni, and other stakeholders will be notified about the entity's suspension of operations and the steps being taken to secure their records. Individuals will be given clear instructions on how to access their records or request that they be transferred to another institution or custodian.

Records will be kept and maintained for a period of 40 years.

9 Public information

DoctorateHub will publish on its website information about the available services and activities, including on the programmes, its modules, courses, mentorships, conferences, clubs and which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to date and readily accessible. At the programme level both the present Quality Assurance Policy and Programme Handbook are available to prospective students.

The information includes:

- the selection criteria for the programmes;
- their intended learning outcomes;
- the qualifications they award, including information on the EQF/MQF level;
- the teaching, learning and assessment procedures used;
- the pass rates;
- the further learning opportunities available to students;
- information on possible career pathways available as a result of taking the programmes

The information available shall be sufficient for prospective applicants to be able to make an informed choice in terms of the knowledge, skills and competences they are likely to acquire on successful completion of the programme.

10 Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes

DoctorateHub implemented an integrated quality management system to meet the needs and expectations of students, faculty, affiliated academic partners and other internal and external stakeholders.

The integrated quality management system governs and defines the various activities undertaken by the institution in order to design, develop, deliver, and continuously assess, evaluate, and improve all of its programmes and service portfolio.

The guiding context for the formulation of DoctorateHub's quality assurance policy consists of the following:

- ENQA, et al., 'Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)' (Brussels: EURASHE, 2015);
- 'Annex 1 - National Quality Assurance Framework Standards Amended to also cover Online/Blended Learning' (Malta: National Commission for Further and Higher Education, 2017);

DoctorateHub has ensured that the quality assurance and enhancement is evidence-based, founded on an organised process of collecting evidence and analysing data to facilitate future actions, in order to meet the requirements outlined in these standards.

DoctorateHub established a separate division, the Head of Quality and Governance, that is reporting directly to the Head of Institution to maintain an overall view of all aspects related to excellence and governance across the institution. Governance, excellence and quality assurance, institutional research and intelligence, institutional planning and effectiveness, risk management, and accreditation are all responsibilities of the Quality and Governance division.

10.1 Continuous Assessment and Quality Enhancement

DoctorateHub uses an ongoing multi-dimensional assessment and improvement process for all programmes and schools. This process is intended to assist leadership, faculty, staff, and students with the direct and indirect assessment methods used to demonstrate the attainment of Module Learning Outcomes (MLOs) and Programme Learning Outcomes (PLOs) and overall performance, as well as the process for utilising data from these assessments to modify and improve learning and performance.

Assessment is carried out at the end of each module cycle, through means of student and faculty surveying, assessment of the learning outcomes, as well through quality checks carried out by the division of the Head of Quality and Governance.

The assessment and improvement process covers different levels of assessment as following detailed.

10.2 Module Level Assessment

At the Module level the Module Learning Outcome (MLO) will be measured through oral assessments at conference at the end of the module.

The assessment at the end of each module will be performed by two experts from the scientific committee. The student is given a 30-minute slot to present and discuss their work to two experts from the scientific committee. The presentation is capped at 5 minutes and followed by 15 minutes of question and answers. The final 10 minutes are then dedicated to work out the concrete next

development steps. Where the student's developments are insufficient to progress to the next study module of the research, the student will be asked to remain on the club journey and to present the research at the subsequent conference in 4 months' time again.

10.3 Course/Mentoring Unit Level Assessment

Course/Mentoring unit level assessment consist of a review of the Course/Mentoring Learning Outcomes (CMLOs) and the level of achievement of course learning objectives. Students are expected to achieve weekly tasks (two weeks duration for part time) for which they will receive formative feedback from the course tutor/mentor.

CMLOs will further be assessed at the end of the course/mentoring unit where students are asked to present the current state of their research project and for which they will receive formative and summative feedback from the course tutor/mentor.

10.4 Club Level Assessment

At the club level students are expected to submit weekly updated drafts from their research (two weeks duration for part time) for which they will receive formative feedback from the course tutor/mentor.

10.5 Conference Level assessment

Each study module ends with a conference event where the students are expected to present the state-of-the-art of their research project to a scientific panel. Two examiners from the scientific panel will assess the student performance and research progression.

10.6 Thesis Supervision Level Assessment

Thesis supervision level assessment is concerned with the feedback and guidance that the thesis supervisor provides to the student. Since thesis supervision is a constant ongoing process, the quality of the supervision support will be measured indirectly and based on two criteria: student satisfaction and student performance and evaluation at the end of Module conferences by the two examiners from the scientific panel.

10.7 Curriculum Level Assessment

Curriculum level assessment is concerned with the review of the alignment between Programme Learning Outcomes (PLOs) and Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs). The main question in here is whether the course curricula provide students with the expected guidance through the doctoral journey. Assessment tools used at this level include at the quantitative end the aggregated CMLOs and MLOs results, and at the qualitative end means such as focus group meetings, curriculum review meetings and faculty retreats.

10.8 Thesis Examination and Viva Voce level Assessment

The Thesis Examination and Viva Voce Level assessment is a direct indicator for the programme effectiveness and how well students are prepared at the end of their research project. The assessment process is detailed in chapter 6.

10.9 Attrition Rate and Extension Track Level Assessments

Doctoral studies are notoriously known for their very high attrition rates and for the fact that a substantial number of students require significantly more time to graduate than stipulated in the programme outline². To cater for such circumstances, assessment at this level will use both quantitative data on the rate and point of attrition and extensions, as well as qualitative data such as reasons provided by students and collected through exit interviews, as well as justifications provided for extensions requested.

10.10 Programme Level Assessment

Programme level assessment is concerned with the review of the overall programme effectiveness, the programme alignment with DoctorateHub vision and mission and the level of achievement of programme outcomes. Assessment at this level will use all of the previous outlined assessment tools and available metrics from the foregoing discussed sub-levels. Additional assessment tools at this level will consist of student surveys, graduate exit surveys, alumni surveys, feedback from industry through informal meetings, employer surveys, training surveys, focus group meetings, top management and Dean's regular meetings with students, benchmarking activities, etc.

10.11 Programme Performance Monitoring

To monitor the programme performance a detailed set of metrics will be collected including:

- Nr of applicants per programme.
- Nr of applicants accepted per programme.
- Nr of enrolled students that progress per programme module / cycle: defined as the percentage of students that progress per module. In general, new programmes experience a drop in progression rate before reaching their peak and stabilising.

² See:

- HESA, 2019, Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2018/19 – Qualifications achieved, <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/16-01-2020/sb255-higher-education-student-statistics/qualifications>
- Hnatkova, E., Degtyarova, I., Kersschot, M., Boman J., 2022, Labour market perspectives for PhD graduates in Europe, The European Journal of Education, Research, Development and Policy. July 2022. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ejed.12514>
- Nature, 2019, PhDs: the tortuous truth, <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-03459-7>
- OECD, 2019, Education at a Glance 2019, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/8389c70e-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/8389c70e-en>
- THE, 2016, Do academics need a split personality to teach older PhDs? <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/do-academics-need-a-split-personality-to-teach-older-phds>
- The Conversation, 2018, PhD completion: an evidence-based guide for students, supervisors and universities, <https://theconversation.com/phd-completion-an-evidence-based-guide-for-students-supervisors-and-universities-99650>
- UKCGE, 2022, Structures and Strategy in Doctoral Education in the UK and Ireland, <https://ukcge.ac.uk/resources/resource-library/structures-and-strategy-in-doctoral-education-in-the-uk-and-ireland>
- Wiley, 2019, The Doctoral Education Market: Trends and Insights in Key Disciplines, <https://universityservices.wiley.com/doctoral-education-market-infographic-2021/>

- Retention rate per programme: there is an overall retention rate, and a first year to second year retention rate, which allows for a more accurate calculation of retention rate in students who are on conditional admission.

Nr. of enrolled students that graduate.

10.12 Tracking and Archiving

All records are digital and will be archived with a third-party ISP. The services contracted with the ISP includes the necessary hardware and software as well as online availability and redundancy systems to secure online services. In addition to this our development lead backs up both the database and the files, as well as the code.

Our Virtual Learning Environment tracks and measures the number of contact hours as these are itemized sessions with a unique ID number, date and duration. In addition to this, we track and measure the students' learning through the assessment of the thesis drafts that students are asked to share at regular points, through the assessment of the assignments (in the courses), and through the assessments of the oral presentations (at the end of each of the study modules).

11 Cyclical external quality assurance

11.1 Continuous external Assessment and Quality Enhancement

Each study module ends with a conference event where the students are expected to present the state-of-the-art of their research project to a scientific panel. Two examiners from the scientific panel will assess the student performance and research progression. The scientific panel is composed to a majority of DoctorateHub's externally sourced freelance faculty, which will allow to receive regular external feedback and input to consider for adjustment and improvement.

11.2 Periodic external Assessment and Quality Enhancement

External quality assurance by, or with the approval of, the NCFHE will be carried out on a cyclical basis according to NCFHE guidelines, once every five years.