

# Code of Practice: Professional Doctorates 2015-16

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# Code of Practice: Professional Doctorates

This document is a broad statement of University requirements covering departments', supervisors' and students' responsibilities in relation to professional doctorates.

Students at Partner Institutions should note that in some cases additional local policies and procedures apply.

## 1. Departments'/Centres' Responsibilities

Each Department, School or Centre with professional doctorates should:

### 1.1. Professional Doctorate Director

Designate a Director for each Professional Doctorate (PD) or a group of professional doctorates. The Director will be responsible to the Head of Department (HoD) for the departmental arrangements for the relevant PD students and for liaising with and reporting as necessary to the Dean of Postgraduate Research and Education and/or the Deputy Dean (Education)<sup>1</sup>.

### 1.2. Admissions

Publicise information about entry requirements, the structure and content of the programme, areas where supervision is offered, whom to contact and information about funding sources administered by the department. Designate a member of academic staff with responsibility for professional doctorate admissions, who may be the Director or some other member of the department.

Ensure that where an application to the programme is received, two designated and trained members of staff are involved in making the admissions decision. These staff may consult other staff who are potential supervisors to discuss the application.

### 1.3. Programme Information

Ensure that on acceptance of an offer of admission (that is normally well before registration) all new PD students are supplied with the details of the PD programme, which have been approved by the Faculty Education Committee, including the necessary taught, professional practice and research components. Departmental documentation will be monitored every three years, or sooner if the department wishes to make any major changes to the arrangements.

### 1.4. Student Induction

Ensure that all new PD students are provided with an induction programme at the start of their period of study (see section 5 below). During the induction, or within the first three weeks of term, the PD Director should discuss the details contained in this Code of Practice, and the departmental

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<sup>1</sup> The title 'Dean of Postgraduate Research and Education' also refers to the Associate Dean of Postgraduate Research and Education.

arrangements relating to it. Students should be given information about expectations and conventions regarding referencing and citations, and be advised about the University's policy on plagiarism and academic offences. Students should be required to sign that they have read and understood the documentation.

### **1.5. Placements**

Where professional practice placements are part of the professional doctorate, ensure that these are arranged in accordance with the University's [Work-Based and Placement Learning guidelines](#) and that students receive written information about the placements.

### **1.6. Professional Practice Supervisors**

Ensure that all new PD students have a designated supervisor for their professional practice, whether this involves a placement or not. A record should be kept by the Director of the programme of the professional practice supervisors for each student for the year/term as appropriate.

### **1.7. Replacement of Professional Practice Supervisors**

Where a professional practice supervisor cannot continue supervision for whatever reason, ensure that a replacement supervisor is appointed. Any permanent changes, as well as arrangements for replacement supervision where a member of staff is on leave, must also be reported to the Registry Research Team on the January and June progress lists.

### **1.8. Research and Generic Skills Training**

Identify and record the student's research and generic skills training needs at the beginning of their studies and review them on a regular basis. Ensure that the student has opportunities for developing appropriate generic and research skills and that a record of module/workshop completion and attendance is kept. This may be in the form of a copy of a record maintained by the student that has been signed off by the supervisor.

### **1.9. Research Supervisors**

Ensure that no later than the beginning of the equivalent of the second year for full-time PD programmes, and no later than the end of the first term for part-time PD programmes, appropriate research supervisory arrangements are in place for all PD students. Each student must have at least one research supervisor who is engaged in research activity and has relevant publications. Where two supervisors are appointed, one supervisor must be nominated as the lead supervisor who will be the first point of contact for the student, and responsible for record keeping and providing reports. Where a member of staff who has not previously supervised a research student through to completion is appointed as sole research supervisor, support must be provided through the department's normal mentoring arrangements as well as through the supervisory board (see section 6 below). The Director must keep an up-to-date record of all the PD students and their research supervisors.

A record of supervisory meetings/communications should be kept in accordance with the [Progress and Appeals Procedures for Research Degree Students](#).

### **1.10. Replacement of Research Supervisors (see section 6 below)**

Ensure that adequate arrangements are made for research supervision when any of the research supervisors either leaves the University or is on leave and is not carrying on with supervision during this period. Any changes in supervision must be approved by the Director of the programme. Any permanent changes must also be approved by the Dean.

### **1.11. Research Supervision and the Frequency of Supervisory Meetings**

Agree suitable norms regarding the frequency of formal supervisory meetings between PD students and research supervisors and ensure they are followed by supervisors. These will probably vary according to the discipline and the stage that the student has reached. These will probably vary according to the discipline and the stage that the student has reached. However, students and supervisors are required to communicate, whether face-to-face or by electronic means, to engage in discussion/review of the student's work and progress at least once a month (and bi-monthly for part-time students). Departments may also wish to specify or recommend the duration of contact. These norms should be included in the written documentation supplied to students and research supervisors. Research supervision should normally be provided until the student has submitted a final version of their thesis to the examiners and should, if this arises, cover any referral period.

### **1.12. Supervisory Boards**

Ensure that a supervisory board involving the research supervisor(s) and at least one member of staff who is not the student's research supervisor is held at least twice a year for each full-time student from the beginning of the second year onwards and at least once a year for part-time students. If a student or supervisor is away from the university in the period when the board is due, the board should be held via Skype, email or video-link. Distance learning students should have at least one face-to-face supervisory board per year.

### **1.13. Time Allocation for Supervision**

Ensure adequate academic staff time is allocated for the supervision of each research student as part of the department's workload allocation model. There can be some flexibility in these arrangements, for example, time allocations might vary according to the stage the student has reached.

### **1.14. Problems with Professional Practice or Research Supervision**

Have a clear and well-publicised procedure that enables students to raise problems regarding their supervisory arrangements. Students should be encouraged to raise problems with their supervisor in the first instance. However, departments should make it clear that students have the right to discuss supervisory problems with a member of staff who is not involved in their supervision, such as the PD Director or Head of Department. Students should also be told that if they feel unable to approach a

member of the department they are free to contact the Registry Research Team. Discussions about problems with either professional practice or research supervision should remain confidential if the student requests this. Students may request a change of supervisor. The chair of the RSPC should consider these requests and accommodate them where practicable, noting that it may not always be possible for suitable alternative arrangements to be made.

### **1.15. Research Thesis Submission Deadlines: Full-time and Part-time Students**

Ensure that students understand the University regulations on thesis submission deadlines. Students should submit their thesis between the end of their minimum period (three years full-time) and the end of their maximum period (four years full-time). Students permitted to enter a one-year completion period at the end of their minimum period do so on the understanding that their full thesis will be ready for submission by the end of that completion period. The minimum period of study may be reduced in exceptional circumstances, with the Executive Deans' (or his/her deputy) or Dean of Academic Partnership's (or his/her deputy) approval.

### **1.16. Progress guidelines**

Provide guidelines for students regarding the volume and standard of work to be expected at the end of each year of their studies. These guidelines should be included in the written documentation supplied to students and supervisors. It should be made clear that progress from one year to the next (including progress into the completion year for part-time students only), will depend on satisfactory achievement of the necessary work.

### **1.17. Examination Board and Research Students' Progress Committee**

Ensure that a Research Students' Progress Committee (RSPC) is held at least once a year towards the end of the academic year, and that mid-year there is another RSPC meeting or review by the PD Director of the progress of all PD students (see section 7 below). This must be reported to the Registry Research Team. In the case of programmes with a taught and/or professional component, ensure that an Examination Board is held each year. Depending on the length and requirements of the programme, there may need to be an interim Examination Board.

### **1.18. Reports on students' progress**

Ensure that an individual report on each student's progress is provided to the Dean towards the end of each year of their study, from the RSPC. This should indicate that all the elements for the stage of the programme have been passed satisfactorily and (from the second year onward for full-time students) report the state of the research and the amount of work that has been carried out. The report should recommend whether the student be allowed to progress to the following year or whether a downgrading or discontinuation is recommended.

### **1.19. Training for Professional Practice Supervisors**

Ensure that all professional practice supervisors are supplied with the University's Code of Practice for Professional Doctorates, and departmental arrangements for professional practice supervision are adequately trained to provide professional practice supervision and are fully aware of the requirements of the supervision they provide and the standards expected of the students.

### **1.20. Staff induction and training**

Ensure that all new members of staff who may become research student supervisors are seen by the Director to discuss the University's Code of Practice for Professional Doctorates and that all supervisors are supplied with a copy of the Department's supervisory arrangements every year. The Department should also ensure that less experienced members of staff who have not supervised a PhD through to completion attend the University's training for research student supervisors and that opportunities for sharing good practice in supervision are included in the arrangements for training and support provided to all academic staff.

Ensure that all members of staff with responsibility for admissions decisions have:

- a. read the Handbook on Graduate Admissions, which describes the central and departmental responsibilities in respect of graduate admissions and includes guidance on overseas qualifications, handling student references, English Language requirements and equality and diversity; and
- b. been briefed on the departmental arrangements for processing applications, by the Director of Research Studies, the Head of Department or his/her nominee in this area.

### **1.21. Academic Networking**

Ensure that PD students are advised of the importance of making contact with other professionals in the field and of presenting their work to professional audiences. This should include advising them on the opportunities to present work to staff and fellow postgraduates, and about attendance and participation in appropriate seminars and conferences.

### **1.22. Facilities**

Ensure that PD students have access to the departmental facilities and equipment necessary to enable them to complete their professional doctorate successfully, and that they have adequate facilities during any placement.

### **1.23. Student Feedback**

Ensure that student feedback is collected and reviewed in accordance with the University's Student Representative Policy. A summary of the feedback and, where appropriate, details of any follow-up, should be provided to the Dean on an annual basis for consideration by the autumn term Education Committee.

#### **1.24. External Research Supervisors**

Where an external supervisor is appointed, ensure that s/he receives a copy of the University's Code of Practice and complies with its requirements.

#### **1.25. Appointment of Examiners**

Nominate examiners for a student's thesis (see section 8.3. below).

Nominate award examiners for assessed elements of the programme that are not covered by the Department's taught Masters examiners.

## **2. Professional Practice and Research Supervisors' Responsibilities**

Professional practice and research supervisors have a responsibility to:

### **2.1. Code of Practice and Guidelines**

Familiarise themselves with this Code of Practice, and the departmental supervisory arrangements.

### **2.2. Regular Meetings**

Professional practice supervisors must maintain regular contact with the student through meetings during the period when the supervised professional practice is taking place; research supervisors must maintain regular contact with the student until the thesis has been submitted and, if this arises, during any referral period.

### **2.3. Guidance**

Provide guidance about the nature and standard of work expected, including advice on attaining that standard, together with advice on professional practice and/or research in the discipline, ethical issues, and appropriate health and safety issues. They should also assist each PD student in developing a clear timetable of work and emphasise the importance of keeping to it. Research supervisors should provide guidance on matters of research design, and on the appropriate volume of research work for the degree in question.

### **2.4. Written Work, Oral Presentations and Feedback**

Request written work and oral presentations as appropriate and comment on such work within a reasonable time.

### **2.5. Accessibility, Leave and Supervisory Changes**

Be reasonably accessible to students during term time and advise them of any lengthy absences during the vacation. Keep each student well informed in advance about any prospective periods of leave and the planned supervisory arrangements during the leave.

### **2.6. Update Knowledge and Skills**

Ensure that their knowledge and skills are as up-to-date as possible. Professional practice supervisors must attend any training required by the Department. Less experienced research supervisors who have not supervised a PhD through to completion must attend the University's course on supervising research degrees.

### **2.7. Research Training**

Identify and record the student's training needs at the beginning of their studies and review them on a regular basis. Ensure that the student has opportunities for developing appropriate generic and

research skills and that a record of course/workshop completion and attendance is kept. This may be in the form of a copy of a record maintained by the student that has been signed off by the supervisor. Keep up to date with courses available through [Proficio](#) and encourage the student to book onto relevant training.

## **2.8. Records of Meetings and Written Work**

Keep a record of dates of formal supervisions with the student and of written work submitted, including when feedback was provided, which can be produced later if necessary.

## **2.9. Supervisory Boards (see section 6 below)**

Research supervisors must ensure that meetings of the supervisory board are arranged for each student in accordance with the requirements set out in paragraph 6.2.

## **2.10. Submit Reports**

Report on each student's progress to the supervisory board (research) or Board of Examiners (professional practice) as required, indicating what has been achieved, advising where s/he believes that the student's progress is satisfactory or where progress is slow. In the case of supervisory boards, the research supervisor should ensure that the chair of the board forwards a report on the board to the PD Director in time for the next RSPC meeting.

## **2.11. Advising Student on Progress**

Warn and advise students in writing, with a copy to the Director, where work is not of the appropriate standard or is being produced too slowly, and of steps which might be taken to remedy the situation.

## **2.12. Employment**

Where appropriate, encourage students to think about their subsequent employment, directing the student to suitable sources of advice and support.

## **2.13. Preparation for Examination of the Research Thesis**

Ensure that students understand the requirements of the degree, provide guidance on the examination process, and help students to prepare for the viva.

## **2.14. Approval of Title**

The supervisor and Head of Department are responsible for approving the proposed title for the thesis, which indicates that the thesis is close to submission. The Approval of Title form should be submitted to the Registry two months prior to submission in order for the appointment of the examiners process to start.

## **2.15. Appointment of Examiners for the Research Thesis**

Nominate examiners for a student's thesis (see section 8.3. below).

## **2.16. Thesis Examination**

The supervisor should not be present at the viva without the specific permission of the Deputy Dean (Education), and normally there should be no contact between the supervisor and the examiners other than to arrange their appointment.

### **3. Students' Responsibilities**

Professional doctorate students have a responsibility to:

#### **3.1. Documentation**

Read the documentation provided to them, including the regulations for their degree, this Code of Practice and details of the departmental supervisory arrangements. Each student should sign a form to certify that s/he has read the documentation and agrees to abide by it.

#### **3.2. Lectures, Seminars, Meetings**

Attend lectures and seminars for their taught modules and attend meetings with their professional practice and research supervisors and supervisory boards as arranged and prepare adequately for them, notifying their supervisor in the event of unavoidable absence.

#### **3.3. Contact with Professional Practice and Research Supervisors**

Keep in regular contact with their professional practice and research supervisor. Students and supervisors are required to communicate, whether face-to-face or by electronic means, to engage in discussion/review of the student's work and progress at least once a month (and bi-monthly for part-time students).

Provide updates on progress as outlined in the [Progress and Appeals Procedures for Research Degree Students](#).

#### **3.4. Agreed Work**

Complete the work required for their taught modules and carry out, as far as possible, the work agreed with their supervisor and submit written work as agreed so that they meet the required milestones.

#### **3.5. Ethics, Health and Safety and IP**

Familiarise themselves with University and subject-specific guidelines on ethical research, including data protection matters, and with health and safety and intellectual property regulations and obtain ethical approval as appropriate.

#### **3.6. Academic Referencing**

Familiarise themselves with the expectations and conventions regarding referencing other people's work.

#### **3.7. Training Courses**

Attend any research training and generic skills courses as agreed with the PD Director.

### **3.8. Report on Progress**

Submit reports on progress as requested to professional practice and research supervisors, supervisory boards, the PD Director, or the departmental Research Students' Progress Committee.

### **3.9. Keep a Record of Progress**

Keep a record of personal progress, including a copy of the agreed training needs, courses that need to be attended and when they are attended. In the case of professional practice, this will usually take the form of a professional practice portfolio which forms part of the assessment for the degree. In the case of research, this may take the form of a log book or research portfolio to be signed off by the supervisor, but will not be part of the assessment for the research component.

### **3.10. Significant Needs or Circumstances**

Inform the relevant module co-ordinator or supervisor and/or the PD Director promptly if there are any specific needs or circumstances likely to affect their work.

Notify the Supervisory Board/Research Students' Progress Committee (see section 7) in writing of any extenuating circumstances that they believe have significantly affected their performance.

### **3.11. Supervisory Problems**

Discuss any supervisory problems with their supervisor or, if they prefer, with the PD or the Head of Department.

Alternatively, if they feel unable to talk to a member of the departmental staff, they should contact the Registry Research Team to discuss their problems. Any discussions will remain confidential if requested. Students may request a change of supervisor but should note that it may not always be possible for suitable alternative arrangements to be made.

### **3.12. Submission of the Thesis**

Students must present their thesis for examination by the end of the final term of their completion period.

A request for an extension of up to two weeks to the submission deadline may be made. Requests must be made to the Registry in advance of the deadline. If granted, an extension, students will not be expected to register or pay the prescribed fee for that two week period.

Students who fail to present their thesis for examination by the deadline shall be deemed to have withdrawn permanently from the University and from their research degree unless they are permitted an exceptional further period of completion.

Where a student has extenuating circumstances that affect their ability to submit the thesis by the agreed deadline, the Deputy Dean (Education) will consider each circumstance on a case-by-case basis.

### **3.13. Preparation for Examination of the Research Thesis**

Familiarise themselves with the guidelines on thesis submission and with the examination process, and ensure that they are prepared for the viva.

## **4. Admissions**

### **4.1. Research Opportunities**

Potential students should be provided with information on the:

- (a) areas in which supervision is offered;
- (b) research degree programmes offered;
- (c) research training provided and;
- (d) research environment in the department.

### **4.2. Funding Information and Selection**

Departments should publicise information on any sources of funding administered by the department, including how to apply for any scholarships/studentships (e.g. Silberrad, University of Essex Scholarships and research council studentships) and the criteria for awarding support. At least three people should be involved in the decision to allocate funding.

### **4.3. Entry Criteria and How to Apply**

The department's entry criteria should be publicised along with information about how to apply. Guidance should be given on preparing a research proposal, where appropriate, making it clear what is required. There is a standard University postgraduate application form and Notes of Guidance on additional requirements.

### **4.4. Considering Applications**

A decision to reject an application can be taken by one member of staff where the application is to conduct research in a field where the department does not offer supervision.

In all other cases decisions must be taken by two designated and trained members of staff (see section 1.2).

The Dean of Postgraduate Research and Education must approve applications from candidates who do not satisfy the standard entry requirements.

### **4.5. Recording Decisions**

A record should be kept of the reasons for rejecting an application or for making an offer for an alternative programme. A record may be placed within the applicant's file, and/or a note may be recorded under the 'Notes' facility on the Applicant Details screen of the Postgraduate Admissions System.

### **4.6. Turnaround Times**

An applicant should normally receive a response within four weeks. The University's advertised service level to applicants is a maximum period of six weeks. The additional fortnight may be necessary in order to further explore the applicant's research topic and ascertain whether suitable supervision is available, or to validate references. Applications may also require the longer processing period over the Christmas vacation. Graduate Admissions should be aware of any applications which

are expected to need longer than this maximum period and the applicant should be informed accordingly.

#### **4.7. Equality and Diversity**

All admissions decisions must relate to a student's estimated potential to succeed academically on a programme. Any criterion used should be an appropriate and genuine requirement, which does not discriminate directly or indirectly against any individual or group on the grounds of gender, colour, ethnic or national origin, age, socio-economic background, disability, religious or political beliefs and affiliations, family circumstances or responsibilities, sexual orientation, gender identity or other irrelevant distinction. Further guidance is available in the published handbook "[\*Equality and Diversity Framework and Sub-Strategy 2015-18\*](#)".

#### **4.8. Communicating Admissions Decisions**

Offer letters are issued by the Head of Graduate Admissions on behalf of the Dean of Postgraduate Research and Education. The offer letter will state the degree programme for which the student is being offered a place, the start date of the study period, the duration of the programme, the estimated cost of tuition fees and living expenses and any conditions which must be met in order for the place to be confirmed. The web address for the Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Degrees is also provided. From May of each year onwards, applicants holding offers and receiving new offers are sent information on University accommodation, how to access the online International Student Handbook and confirmation of the tuition fee amounts for the forthcoming year.

Applicants who are rejected are informed in writing by the Graduate Admissions Office.

#### **4.9. Monitoring**

##### **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY**

The University's Education Committee receives a summary of monitoring of gender, disability and ethnicity for applications and rejections at its autumn meeting each year. In advance of Education Committee, each department will receive a detailed report from the Head of Graduate Admissions, with a request for feedback on any anomalies.

##### **TURNAROUND TIMES**

The Head of Graduate Admissions will monitor the turnaround times of research degree applications in accordance with paragraph 4.6 and will raise any concerns with the Head of Department.

## **5. Student Induction**

### **5.1. Information**

PD students should be provided by departments with the following information as soon as possible after they accept their offer and no later than the end of the second week of their first term:

- (a) general information about the University and its postgraduate portfolio in the relevant subject(s);
- (b) the University's regulations and procedures for professional doctorates;
- (c) details of the professional doctorate including the taught elements, professional practice (including any placements) and research, and the assessment requirements;
- (d) general information about student support and welfare services;
- (e) a summary of the facilities that will be made available to the student;
- (f) relevant health and safety and other legislative information.

### **5.2. Face-to-Face Induction**

Departments should strongly encourage students to attend university-wide induction events, such as those organised through Proficio. In addition, departments should hold a face-to-face student induction no later than the end of the third week of the first term. This should cover:

- (a) the University's and the students' responsibilities as set out in this Code of Practice;
- (b) the challenges that will typically face professional doctorate students during the course of their studies and where guidance may be sought in the event of difficulties;
- (c) progress and, where appropriate, completion procedures and requirements;
- (d) the University's research ethics and codes and those of relevant professional bodies and discipline groups;
- (e) issues concerning authorship, plagiarism and intellectual property;
- (f) details about opportunities and requirements for skills development;
- (g) opportunities for careers advice and preparing for post-graduation;
- (h) opportunities for postgraduates to be represented on departmental and school student liaison committees and the Education Committee;
- (i) opportunities for interdisciplinary activities;
- (j) departmental policies on funding attendance at conferences.

### **5.3. Distance Learning Students and January or April Starters**

Departments should ensure that distance learning students or students who register after the beginning of the academic year receive written information about all of the above if they are unable to attend the department's induction programme.

## **6. Supervisory Boards (Research Thesis)**

### **6.1. Composition**

Supervisory boards should normally consist of the supervisor(s), plus at least one other member of the academic staff who is not involved in supervising the student, who should chair the board. Where the supervisor is a less experienced member of staff who has not supervised a student through to completion, the chair must be an experienced supervisor.

### **6.2. Timetabling and Frequency of Meetings**

Research supervisors should ensure that meetings of supervisory boards with the student are arranged at least twice a year for full-time students, during their second and third years, and at least once a year for part-time students until they have submitted. If the student is studying away when the board is due, acceptable alternative arrangements should be put in place to monitor the student's progress, such as a supervisory board meeting held via by Skype, e-mail or video-link.

### **6.3. Advice, Monitoring and Reports**

The purpose of supervisory boards is to provide the student with a wider range of advice on their research and to provide an opportunity to reflect on the student's progress. It is also the role of the chair of the board to prepare a formal report on the student's progress for the Director and/or the RSPC. At each meeting, the supervisory board should receive a written report from the student on progress and a future work schedule as well as oral or written comments on the student's progress from the supervisor. The supervisory board may also receive a formal report of extenuating circumstances from the student, which should be considered by the board and included in the report to the RSPC. At the end of the meeting, the chair should complete a report of the board, including any recommendations made, which should subsequently be seen and acknowledged by the supervisor and the student. If there is concern about the student's progress this must be indicated clearly in the chair's report. A copy of the report should then be forwarded to the Director, along with the student's report, for consideration at the next Board of Examiners/PDPC meeting.

### **6.4. Board Membership and Internal Examining**

No member of staff who has been a member of a supervisory board during the final six months before submission of the thesis may be nominated as the internal examiner.

## **7. Examination Board and Research Students' Progress Committee**

### **7.1. Composition and Role of the Examination Board**

An Examination Board is responsible for making decisions on any taught or professional elements of a professional doctorate.

The Examination Board for a professional doctorate should follow the University's rules concerning the composition of Examination Boards and those concerning anonymity. The Board must be chaired by an experienced member of staff from outside the Department and must include the Director. The other members would normally include an experienced professional practice supervisor. The Examination Board must meet annually, and may have interim meetings. The Examination Board will agree any marks for taught modules and receive reports on any professional component. The Examination Board will send a copy of the pass list and marks grid to the Research Students' Progress Committee (RSPC).

### **7.2. Composition and Role of the RSPC**

The postgraduate Research Students' Progress Committee (RSPC), to be established by each department, should be chaired by the DRS or HoD, and should include at least two other experienced supervisors. It should review the progress of every student through to the award of a degree, withdrawal or failure, on the basis of the reports from the supervisory board, including the written report from the student and any submission of extenuating circumstances. Where no supervisory board has taken place, for instance because a student is carrying out research abroad, the supervisor and the student must each submit a progress report. A decision/recommendation for discontinuation or downgrading, to permit entry into completion, or to extend the minimum period can only be made by the RSPC. Where the RSPC is considering a recommendation from a student's supervisory board of discontinuation or downgrading, the RSPC membership must include at least two members who were not on the student's last supervisory board. Smaller departments may want to co-opt a supervisor from another department in a cognate discipline as a member of the RSPC if the department finds it difficult to satisfy this requirement.

### **7.3. Frequency and Timing**

There should be at least two formal reviews of research students' progress each year, one held mid-year in December/January and one in June. Any review that recommends progression to the next year, entry into the completion period and any recommendation for discontinuation or downgrading should normally take the form of a face-to-face meeting of the RSPC. Any other review may either take the form of a meeting of the RSPC or of a review of the progress of all research students by the Director of Research Students on the basis of the written reports from supervisory boards.

An additional meeting of the RSPC may be required in September to consider any outstanding progress decisions which need to be made before the start of the new academic year.

#### **7.4. Taught/Professional Requirements**

For students on a professional doctorate programme that includes compulsory taught and/or professional requirements, as part of the consideration of students' progress, the RSPC shall receive a copy of the recommendations from the appropriate Board of Examiners meeting, including the approved marks.

#### **7.5. Reports and Recommendations to the Dean**

The RSPC will report its decisions/recommendations on each student to the Registry Research Team at least annually as follows:

- (a) a list of the decisions on students who have been allowed to proceed with their studies either unconditionally or subject to further review at a specified date if appropriate;
- (b) a recommendation that the student's status should be altered (e.g. downgraded, minimum period extended, moved into completion, etc.); or
- (c) a recommendation that the student's studies should be discontinued.

The Dean may accept or reject the recommendation.

In all cases, a copy of the supervisory board report on each student shall be forwarded to the Registry Research Team.

#### **7.6. Downgrading or Discontinuation**

If the RSPC is minded to make a recommendation that a student's status be downgraded or studies discontinued, the student must be offered an opportunity to discuss this with the RSPC before the final recommendation is forwarded to the Dean and if appropriate to present evidence about any extenuating circumstances. The student should be invited to meet with the RSPC, or the Chair of the RSPC, in advance of the formal recommendation being made to the Dean. If downgrading or discontinuation is confirmed by the RSPC and the Dean, the student may then request a review of the recommendation (see Appeals against Progress Decisions). The Committee should in all cases inform the student in writing of the Committee's recommendation and of the opportunity to appeal.

#### **7.7. Mid-Year Recommendations and Special Meetings**

The RSPC can recommend discontinuation or downgrading at any point in the academic year and special meetings can be convened at any time.

#### **7.8. Requests for Further Information From the Dean**

The Dean may request further information on any student and discuss his/her progress with the student, supervisor, DRS or HoD as necessary. The Dean may require the departmental RSPC to reconsider the situation of any student, and its progress decisions, where this seems necessary. In cases where the student(s) concerned is supervised by the Dean, or he/she serves on the supervisory board, the Dean shall arrange for another Dean to act in any circumstances that depart from normal expectations.

## **8. Assessment (Research Thesis)**

### **8.1. Nomination and Appointment of Thesis Examiners**

When a student submits their Approval of Title Form, the department will be asked to nominate two examiners: one internal and one external, whose names have to be approved by the Deputy Dean (Education).

### **8.2. Staff Candidates**

In the case of staff candidates the department must nominate three external examiners, two of whom will be appointed by the Dean.

### **8.3. Eligibility to be an Internal Examiner**

The internal examiner for a research degree should be:

- (a) a member of the academic staff of the University or partner institution;
- (b) research active with appropriate expertise;
- (c) normally have a degree, or equivalent<sup>2</sup>, at the level at which they are being appointed to examine (if not a case as to their suitability needs to be made).

The internal examiner should not:

- (a) have been the student's supervisor (main, joint or secondary) other than acting as a temporary supervisor for a period of up to a year but not in the final 12 months before submission of the thesis;
- (b) have been a member of the supervisory board during the final six months before submission of the thesis;
- (c) have a professional or personal relationship with the student or the external examiner that might give rise to a conflict of interest;
- (d) be the partner or a close relative of the supervisor (main, joint or secondary).

### **8.4. Eligibility to be an External Examiner**

The external examiner for a research degree should be:

- (a) research active with appropriate expertise;
- (b) normally employed in an HE institution (if not, including Emeritus Professors, a case as to their suitability needs to be made);
- (c) a senior member of staff and/or an experienced examiner (if not, a senior and experienced internal examiner must be appointed);
- (d) qualified to the level at which they are being appointed to examine (if not, a case as to their suitability needs to be made).

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<sup>2</sup>A Professor with appropriate publications would be considered to be 'equivalent' and a case would not need to be made.

The external examiner should not:

- (a) have been a former member of the academic staff or a student of the University or partner institution in the past five years;
- (b) have been involved in the supervision of the student;
- (c) have a professional or personal relationship with the student, the student's supervisor or the internal examiner that might give rise to a conflict of interest.

## **8.5. Role of the External Examiner**

The external examiner's duties are as follows:

- (a) to read the thesis;
- (b) to reach an independent judgment on the thesis, against the appropriate criteria for the award, without consulting the internal examiner about the assessment, and to record this on a preliminary Report Form prior to the viva;
- (c) to attend the viva and viva pre-meeting;
- (d) to come to an agreement (see section 8.11 below) with the internal examiner as to the outcome of the examination;
- (e) with the internal examiner, to complete the Joint Report Form;
- (f) in the case of a referral, normally to re-examine the referred thesis.

## **8.6. Role of the Internal Examiner**

The internal examiner's duties are as follows:

- (a) to read the thesis;
- (b) to reach an independent judgment on the thesis, against the appropriate criteria for the award, without consulting the external examiner about the assessment, and to record this on a preliminary Report Form prior to the viva;
- (c) to oversee the arrangements for the assessment process including liaising with the external examiner to set a date for the viva;
- (d) to ensure that the department notifies the student of the date for the viva;
- (e) to oversee the proceedings at the viva;
- (f) to come to an agreement (see section 8.11 below) with the external examiner as to the outcome of the examination;
- (g) with the external examiner, to complete the Joint Report Form;
- (h) in the case of a referral, normally to re-examine the referred thesis.

## **8.7. Timescale**

The viva should normally be held no later than three months after the receipt of the thesis by the examiners.

## 8.8. Conduct of the Viva

Both examiners should be present at the viva and are expected to follow the Guidelines on the Viva. The examiners should hold a pre-viva meeting to discuss their preliminary views on the thesis and to plan the viva. The candidate should be given the opportunity to defend the thesis. It will usually be necessary for the candidate to leave the room while the examiners confer as to the outcome of the examination and the candidate should then be told the result. Where it is not possible to conduct the viva face-to-face, permission must be requested from the Deputy Dean (Education) for the viva to be conducted via a video link/Skype.

## 8.9. Independent Chair

In certain circumstances, such as where the candidate is examined only by external examiners or in an examination following an appeal, the Dean may appoint an independent chair to attend a viva. Where there is no internal examiner the independent chair will perform the co-ordinating function in relation to the examination process. The independent chair is not an examiner of the thesis.

## 8.10. Reports and Recommendations

Before the viva, the internal and external examiners must each complete, independently, a preliminary Report Form giving their initial assessment of the thesis. These reports should be submitted to the Registry Research Team.

Following the viva, the examiners must complete a Joint Report Form, which records the outcome of the examination, including the formal recommendation. The examiners may recommend one of the following examination outcomes on academic grounds::

- (a) pass – no corrections required;
- (b) pass with *minor typographical/presentational corrections* – the student makes the corrections prior to binding the thesis;
- (c) pass with *minor editorial revisions* to be made within two months – the examiners must provide a list of the revisions that they wish to see made and the internal examiner must confirm in writing that these have been made satisfactorily. Revisions must be made and the thesis submitted within two months;
- (d) pass with *editorial revisions* to be made within four months – the examiners must provide a list of revisions that they wish to see made and the internal examiner must confirm in writing that these have been made satisfactorily. Revisions must be made and the thesis submitted within four months;
- (e) referral – for re-examination in up to 12 months – the student may resubmit, on one occasion only, a revised thesis for re-examination within 12 months. The examiners must provide a statement describing the shortcomings of the thesis and the changes required. These may include, amongst other things, editorial corrections and revisions, rewriting a part, parts or the whole of the thesis, the carrying out of further research and/or experimental work. They must also specify the referral period required, which should not normally be less than four months or exceed 12 months;

- (f) fail – the examiners must provide a clear statement describing the shortcomings of the thesis.

The examiners may also recommend one of the following:

- (a) award of a Masters by Dissertation – the candidate has not met the requirements but has met the requirements for the degree of Masters by Dissertation. No corrections are required but the candidate must amend the title page of the thesis;
- (b) award of a Masters by Dissertation with *minor editorial revisions* to be made within two months – the candidate has not met the requirements but has met the requirements for the degree of Masters by Dissertation, subject to the approval of minor editorial revisions. The examiners must provide a list of the revisions that they wish to see made and the internal examiner must confirm in writing these have been made satisfactorily. Revisions must be made and the thesis submitted within two months;
- (c) award of a Masters by Dissertation with *editorial revisions* to be made within four months – the examiners must provide a list of the revisions that they wish to see made and the internal examiner must confirm in writing these have been made satisfactorily. Revisions must be made and the thesis submitted within four months.
- (d) referral for a Masters by Dissertation – the candidate has not met the requirements but may resubmit a revised thesis for re-examination for the degree of Masters by Dissertation. The examiners must provide a statement describing the shortcomings of the thesis and the changes required. These may include, amongst other things, editorial corrections and revisions, rewriting a part, parts or the whole of the thesis, the carrying out of further research and/or experimental work. They must also specify the referral period required, which should not normally be less than four months or exceed 12 months.

Candidates are entitled to receive copies of the examiners' pre and post viva reports on their thesis on request, when examining is complete.

On receiving the examiners' recommendation, the Deputy Dean (Education) will seek confirmation from the PD Director that all components of the PD programme have been completed satisfactorily before approving the award of the degree.

## **8.11. Waiving the Viva**

### **FIRST SUBMISSION**

Permission to waive a viva will only be granted by the Dean in exceptional circumstances. The Registry Research Team would then notify the student of the examiners' wish not to hold a viva and the reasons for it, but they would be told that they have the right to have a viva if they wish.

## **REFERRED THESIS**

Where the recommended outcome of the examination of a referred thesis is a pass, then a request by the examiners to waive the viva will normally be granted. Where the recommendation is not a pass then a request by the examiners to waive the viva will only be granted in exceptional circumstances. The Registry Research Team would then notify the student of the examiners' request and the reasons for it, but they would be told that they have a right to have a viva if they wish.

### **8.12. Disagreement Between Examiners**

When the examiners are unable to reach agreement on the outcome of the examination they shall record this on the Joint Report Form. A new internal and external examiner shall be appointed. The new examiners will be informed that the first examiners failed to reach a decision but will not be shown the preliminary reports. The new examiners will examine the thesis in the normal manner.

### **8.13. Suspected Academic Offences**

If either of the examiners suspects an academic offence at any stage during the examination process they should notify the Registry Research Team which will arrange for the matter to be investigated in accordance with the University's [Academic Offences Policy](#). The viva shall be suspended.

## 9. Appeals Procedures

[Appeals procedure against a decision by an Examination Board - Taught Programmes of Study](#)

[Appeals against an examination decision - postgraduate research students \(thesis\)](#)

[Appeals against a progress decision - professional doctorate students](#)

## **10. Criteria for Award of Research Degrees**

The work (thesis/dissertation) submitted by a candidate for a research degree is assessed against the following criteria as set out in the Higher Degree Regulations.

### **MASTERS BY DISSERTATION**

A candidate submitting a dissertation for a Mastership is required to present the results of research carried out during the approved period of study and should demonstrate advanced understanding of the area of study. The dissertation should set out the relationship between the candidate's work and the wider field of knowledge, and should be expressed clearly and concisely.

In the case of a thesis involving original creative output, for the degree of Masters by Dissertation, the thesis must embody the results of research carried out/or output created during the approved period of study and should demonstrate advanced understanding of the area of study. The thesis must contain a commentary which addresses the originality and artistic relevance of the work.

The dissertation should set out the relationship between the candidate's work and the wider field of knowledge/the genre, and should be expressed clearly and concisely.

### **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

A thesis submitted by a candidate for the degree of Master of Philosophy must embody the results of research carried out during the approved period of study and should make a contribution to knowledge. In the thesis and the examinations the candidate is required to present the results of research that either forms original work or is an ordered and critical exposition of existing knowledge. The thesis should set out the relationship between the candidate's work and the wider field of knowledge, and should be expressed clearly and concisely.

In the case of a thesis involving original creative output, for the degree of Master of Philosophy, the thesis must embody the results of research carried out and/or output created during the approved period of study. The thesis must contain a commentary which addresses the originality and artistic relevance of the work. Within the thesis the candidate must show evidence of the originality of the work or an ordered and critical exposition of existing knowledge/the genre.

The thesis should demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the candidate's work and the wider field of knowledge/the genre, and should be expressed clearly and concisely.

### **DOCTOR OF MEDICINE**

The thesis must meet the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy.

### **DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

A thesis submitted by a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy must embody the results of research carried out during the approved period of study. In the thesis and examinations the candidate is required to conduct and present original investigations that make a significant contribution to knowledge, to test ideas, whether the candidate's own or those of others, to

understand the relationship of the theme of the investigations to a wider field of knowledge and to express him/herself clearly and concisely.

In the case of a thesis involving original creative output, for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, the thesis must embody the results of research carried out and/or output created during the approved period of study. The thesis must contain a commentary which addresses the originality and artistic relevance of the work.

Within the thesis and oral examination the candidate must show evidence of the originality of the work, demonstrate an understanding of the relationship of the theme of the thesis to a wider field of knowledge, make a significant contribution to knowledge/the genre, and must express him/herself clearly and concisely.

## **PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE**

A thesis submitted by a candidate for the doctorate must embody the results of research carried out during the approved period of study. In the thesis and the oral examination the candidate is required to conduct and present original investigations that make a significant contribution to the nature of practice within the profession or to the way theory is applied, to understand the relationship of the theme of the investigations to a wider field of knowledge and to express him/herself clearly and concisely.

## **Word length**

<b>Degree</b>	<b>Maximum word length<sup>3</sup></b>
Masters by Dissertation	30,000
MPhil	50,000
Doctor of Medicine	65,000
PhD	80,000
Professional Doctorate	40,000

These word lengths exclude any references and bibliography

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<sup>3</sup>Maximum word lengths for a thesis including creative output may vary depending on the format of the thesis submission. Nominal word lengths for each format are to be approved by the Registry Research Team and published to students.

## 11. Information and Regulations available elsewhere

Your registration as a research student is governed by the Higher Degree Regulations. These can be found on the University website at:

### **Higher Degree Regulations**

[www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/regulations/regulations-higher.aspx](http://www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/regulations/regulations-higher.aspx)

### **Academic Offences Procedure**

[www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/policies/academic-offences.aspx](http://www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/policies/academic-offences.aspx)

### **Appeals Procedure for Research Degree Students**

[www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/policies/research-progress-appeals.aspx](http://www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/policies/research-progress-appeals.aspx)

### **Code of Practice on Teaching and Demonstrating by Graduate Students**

[www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/documents/regulations/cop-graduate-students.pdf](http://www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/documents/regulations/cop-graduate-students.pdf) (pdf)

### **Code of Practice: Professional Doctorates**

[www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/documents/policies/cop\\_professional\\_doctorates.pdf](http://www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/documents/policies/cop_professional_doctorates.pdf) (pdf)

### **Code of Practice for the Supervision of Masters' Dissertations**

[www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/documents/regulations/cop-masters-dissertations.pdf](http://www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/documents/regulations/cop-masters-dissertations.pdf) (pdf)

### **Conduct of Research Degree Vivas by Video Link**

[www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/documents/regulations/cop-vivas-via-video.pdf](http://www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/documents/regulations/cop-vivas-via-video.pdf) (pdf)

### **Data Protection and Research Activity**

[www.essex.ac.uk/records\\_management/policies/data\\_protection\\_and\\_research.aspx](http://www.essex.ac.uk/records_management/policies/data_protection_and_research.aspx)

### **Higher Degree Regulations: Examination of Staff Candidates**

[www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/documents/regulations/research-degrees.pdf](http://www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/documents/regulations/research-degrees.pdf) (pdf)

**Progress and Procedure for Research Degree Students**

[www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/policies/research-progress-appeals.aspx](http://www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/policies/research-progress-appeals.aspx)

**University of Essex Student Handbook**

[www.essex.ac.uk/student\\_handbook](http://www.essex.ac.uk/student_handbook)

**University Regulations, Policy and Procedure**

[www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/regulations/default.aspx](http://www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/regulations/default.aspx)