Chapter 9
Quality Assurance of Research Degrees

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1. SCOPE AND PURPOSE

This chapter describes the processes that the University has put in place to assure the quality of the research degrees that it awards.[1] The chapter outlines the form that approval, monitoring and review take in relation to each relevant element of research degrees at Edge Hill. It generally does not repeat the content of the University's Research Degree Regulations,[2] which are the definitive statement of both regulative and constitutive matters in relation to the University's research degrees and are in no way modified or overturned by the content of this chapter. The Research Degree Regulations, however, do not describe many of the Graduate School co-ordinated processes that are essential to the quality management of research degrees at Edge Hill. As a consequence, this chapter, along with various other Graduate School guidance and process documents,[3] supplements the Research Degree Regulations and its appendices (Schedules A-G), and describes in greater detail processes only briefly mentioned, or in some cases merely alluded to, in the Research Degree Regulations.

The processes are situated centrally and managed through the Graduate School Board of Studies (GSBoS), Research Degrees Sub-Committee (RDSC)[4] and the Graduate School,[5] which, collectively, act as the focus for all processes and procedures relevant to the experience of postgraduate researchers (PGRs) whilst they are at the University.

2. PRINCIPLES

The University's research degree processes are intended to be both robust and also to fulfil a developmental function by, for example, preparing PGRs for their final oral examination through exposing them to vivas and viva-like experiences involving increasing degrees of critique and externality from an early stage in their research. In the development of its policies and procedures Edge Hill takes full account of the Office for Students conditions of registration,[6] *the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education*,[7] of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications,[8] and of practice across the higher education sector. The University's policies and procedures are transparent and conducted in such a way as to ensure, as far as is possible, the independence - from the project and associated thesis or dissertation upon

[1] By Order of the Privy Council, Edge Hill University was granted Research Degree Awarding Powers in August 2008.
[2] Available at https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/research-degree-regulations/
[3] Listed in Schedule E of the Research Degree Regulations.
[4] For the constitution and terms of reference for both the Graduate School Board of Studies and Research Degrees Sub-Committee see Quality Management Handbook (QMH) Chapter 8: https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/quality-management-handbook/
[5] http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/graduateschool/.
[6] https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/regulation/conditions-of-registration/initial-and-general-ongoing-conditions-of-registration/
[7] https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code
[8] https://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/quality-code/qualifications-and-credit-frameworks

which the assessment of PGRs is based - of those taking decisions about the progression and examination of PGRs. Information regarding research degrees is included on the Graduate School website and on the PGR Blackboard site which are updated regularly and made available to PGRs and supervisors.

Edge Hill regards its PGRs as being early career researchers who are completing research that will prepare them for careers not only as researchers and university staff but also, through the development of a range of skills and reflection on the learning they bring to their research, for careers outside academia.

Edge Hill University supports lifelong learning, and this is reflected in the fact that a proportion of its PGRs study in part-time mode. The institution is committed to ensuring that its research degree processes are designed to meet the needs of part-time, as well as full-time, PGRs, in particular through ensuring that mandatory training and development sessions and other obligatory processes are identified with as much notice as possible and are generally scheduled on the same single day each week, or sometimes at the weekend, to assist those studying part-time, and Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) who have teaching responsibilities.

3. RESPONSIBLE STRUCTURES WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY

The University's academic governance structure is the means by which large structures (departments, faculties etc.) are accountable to the University in relation to much of their responsibilities. As a consequence, it is really the Graduate School, not the GSBoS (which is part of the Graduate School), or Research Degrees Sub-Committee that is ultimately responsible for research degrees at Edge Hill. The accountability of the RDSC, via the University Research and Innovation Committee, to Academic Board is the means by which the Graduate School is held accountable to the University.

The Graduate School

The Graduate School is responsible for the development and operation of the processes and procedures relating to all aspects of research degree registrations, progression and examination. The Graduate School is managed by the Dean of the Graduate School, assisted by the Associate Dean of the Graduate School and the Graduate School Manager. The Graduate School is an academic unit of the University, but it is also, in a wider sense, essentially a complex network of academics, managers, administrators and structures, managed and coordinated by the Dean, Associate Dean and Graduate School Manager.

The Graduate School is also responsible for taking a range of decisions in relation to PGR registration that do not require more formal consideration by GSBoS. Those include the following:

- changes to registration (mode of study, target award)
- extensions
- interruptions of study
- approval of initial supervisory teams
- approval of changes to supervisory teams
- approval of examination panels

Some applications for changes to registration, including withdrawals, simply require administrative checking and processing by administrators in the Graduate School, but where decisions are required the Graduate School Manager is responsible for making those decisions. Extensions and interruptions are considered by the Associate Dean of the Graduate School (who is also the Chair of the Graduate School Board of Studies). Approval of initial supervisory teams, changes to supervisory teams and approval of examination panels are the responsibility of the Graduate School Manager. Where necessary, the Graduate School Manager will consult the Associate Dean. The Dean of the Graduate School does not generally take a role in matters that concern individual PGRs, including the work of the Graduate School Board of Studies, in order to remain independent to consider appeals if necessary.

Graduate School Board of Studies

The University's research degrees are awarded by Academic Board, which devolves its powers in this respect to the Graduate School Board of Studies (GSBoS), which is not a deliberative committee but a Progression & Award Board of the University, with some additional responsibilities for other academic matters as specified in its Terms of Reference. Graduate School Board of Studies operates under the delegated authority of Academic Board. The Dean of the Graduate School provides an annual overview report for Academic Board which is the research degree equivalent of the annual overview report on the operation of Progression and Award Boards for Taught provision, which confirms that all awards have been made in accordance with the appropriate regulations and processes.

The Graduate School Board of Studies is chaired by the Associate Dean of the Graduate School and deals with the following business:

- approval of examination outcomes (project registration, progression, and final examination)
- awards
- review of individual PGR progress
- annual appraisals
- final decisions on malpractice outcomes
- final decisions on fitness to study
- final decisions on termination of registration

Research Degrees Sub-Committee

Research Degrees Sub-Committee is a deliberative committee and is concerned not with individual research degree registrations, but rather with matters related to developments in the sector, quality, regulations, policies and PGR experience, etc. The Research Degrees Sub-Committee meets three times per year and is chaired by the Dean of the Graduate School. The Research Degrees Sub-Committee is a sub-committee of the Research and Innovation Committee and reports in the standard way through its minutes etc.

4. THE UNIVERSITY'S RESEARCH DEGREES

Edge Hill currently awards four research degrees, the Master by Research (MRes), the Master of Philosophy (MPhil), the Professional Doctorate and the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). The MPhil cannot be a target award and is only awarded to PhD candidates unsuccessful in gaining a doctorate following final examination for a doctorate. The PhD may be obtained either by PGRs following the conventional route, or by staff or former staff submitting a portfolio of published work and analytical commentary. In each case assessment is by a *viva voce* examination. The characteristics of each award are outlined in the Research Degree Regulations and are described in more detail in Schedule C of those regulations, and the Research Degree Handbook.[9]

5. APPROVAL, MONITORING AND REVIEW IN RELATION TO RESEARCH DEGREES

Approval and modification of research degrees

There is a single route for each research degree (PhD, professional doctorate and MRes), and the PhD by publication is an alternative route to a PhD available to staff of the University and some former staff. There are no individual research degree programmes – no tokens of a given type of research degree, in the way that there are, for example, individual validated tokens of the type Bachelor of Arts, such as a B.A. in History or a B.A. in English. As a consequence, there is no validation of research degrees, but rather approval of research degree routes or modifications to research degree routes by Research Degrees Sub-Committee.

[9] http://eshare.edgehill.ac.uk/15194/

Modifications of research degree routes

Proposal of new research degrees is very rare, and given that the University offers the PhD, PhD by publication, professional doctorate and MRes, and has defined routes for each, and, in addition has withdrawn the MPhil as a target award, it seems unlikely that any new research degree routes will be proposed in the foreseeable future.

Nonetheless, changes may occasionally be required to research degree routes. In such cases, the Graduate School convenes a working group to identify the options available. The working group submits formal proposals to Research Degrees Sub-Committee for consideration. RDSC may suggest modifications, request further developmental work, or approve the proposals in their entirety. The process is coordinated by the Dean of the Graduate School, who then makes the necessary alterations to the Research Degree Regulations through the formal process for amending those regulations.

Approval of Professional Doctorate cohorts

Another form of approval that is occasionally required is that of new professional doctorate cohorts. Such approval can take two forms – approval of the intake of a new cohort studying in an area where the University already has at least one cohort working in that area, and approval of the first cohort for professional doctorate study in a given subject area. As already noted, the professional doctorate route has been approved and any proposal to take a cohort working in a given subject area must be consistent with the approved route. That means that approval of new cohorts, whether the first in a given subject area or a subsequent intake in an existing professional doctorate subject area, concentrates on the supervisory capacity and expertise of the proposing team, the availability of internal examiners, the availability of facilities and resources, the size of the proposed cohort, and the proposed post-nominal designation. A formal application to RDSC must be made by each proposing team by completion of the relevant pro forma. Representatives of the proposing team attend part of the meeting of RDSC that considers the application and are questioned by members of the sub-committee. RDSC may require modifications, or may reject a proposal, but when approval is given that approval is only for the intake of a single cohort. The intake of subsequent cohorts requires separate approval at a later date. RDSC also stipulates a maximum number of PGRs that may be taken in the cohort that it approves and confirms the post-nominal designation. There is no separate programme title (because there is no programme, but only a route), so PGRs are awarded a professional doctorate and may use the approved post-nominal designation, but they are not awarded a professional doctorate in a named subject, rather, the certificate gives the title of the research project (the thesis title). The award would, therefore, be of a professional doctorate, not, for example, of an EdD.

Review of research degree routes

Research degree routes are not programmes, and as such they are not the kind of thing that can be reviewed in the way that programmes are standardly reviewed. The research degree experience of each individual is more or less unique, so it is not possible to make the kind of inferences from general data about, for example, completion rates, withdrawals, times to completion etc. that are standardly made in the evaluation and review of programmes. The same issues arise in relation to figures on recruitment and the 'performance' of specific departments or faculties. As a consequence, the evaluation and review of research degrees is quite different from that of taught programmes.

Evaluation and review is holistic and conducted annually by the Graduate School. There are two interconnected sets of processes that provide data for evaluation and review of research degrees – one is the appraisal of individual PGR progress and experiences, and the other is the process of benchmarking that culminates in the annual updates to the Research Degree Regulations and chapter 9 of the Quality Management Handbook.

The appraisal of PGR progress and experiences includes formal annual appraisal conducted by the Graduate School Board of Studies, formal review of PGR progress, which is conducted by the Graduate School Board of Studies in cases where the Board deems it necessary to provide the support to an individual PGR that is afforded by the production of a short report by the PGR and another by the Director of Studies on behalf of the supervisory team at regular intervals for a fixed period of time to assist a PGR who has been struggling or who is returning from a period of interruption of studies. The Graduate School also oversees the approval of supervisory teams informed by regular capacity checks made by the Graduate School to ensure that, before accepting a PGR, the University has the capacity to provide the required number of supervisors with appropriate subject expertise, and the necessary internal examiners for the project.

The processes by which amendments are made on an annual basis to the Research Degree Regulations and to chapter 9 of the Quality Management Handbook involve consideration by the Graduate School of relevant developments in relation to research degrees that emerge from the work of the OfS, QAA, RCUK, the UK Council for Graduate Education, the Research and Enterprise Network for Universities and Vitae, along with agendas such as the REF and Athena SWAN. In addition, the Graduate School provides the opportunity to review our own provision by reflecting on the PGR experience through the work of Research Degrees Sub-Committee, Postgraduate Researcher Representatives and the associated PGR representation structures.

Review and approval of changes to Research Degrees Regulations

Such benchmarking and evaluation leads to the Graduate School identifying proposed amendments to the Research Degree Regulations. Those proposals are considered at the spring meeting of Research Degrees Sub-Committee. They are then considered by Research and Innovation Committee before being considered and approved by Academic Board at its July meeting. The final, amended version of the Research Degree Regulations and associated appendices is then taken back to RDSC at its first meeting of the new academic year for information. Changes made to the Research Degree Regulations and any alterations to processes and procedures made during the year are reflected in the revisions to chapter 9 of the Quality Management Handbook.

Review of Professional Doctorates

There are three kinds of review of professional doctorates: i. review of the route(s); ii. review of capacity; and iii. review of the content of subject-specific training. The routes are reviewed in the way described above under 'Review of Research Degree Routes'.

Capacity is reviewed as described above under 'Approval of Professional Doctorate Cohorts' because approval is only ever for the intake of a single cohort, so the approval of any subsequent cohort requires an additional application by the delivery team.

Review of the subject-specific training is completed annually by the delivery team under the co-ordination of the relevant professional doctorate lead. The results of such reviews are considered by RDSC.

Admission to Edge Hill's research degrees

A candidate must normally hold at least an upper second-class honours degree from a UK HEI, its equivalent from an HEI outside the UK,[10] or other equivalent qualifications or professional experience. Evidence of equivalence will normally be presented through a portfolio. Applicants for research degrees must provide at least two academic references from appropriate referees who can attest to their academic attainment and fitness for research.

Applications for admission to a research degree are received by the Graduate School, which processes them and sends them to the relevant Graduate School Research Degree Coordinator who manages the process of scrutiny of both the application and references. Where an applicant's qualifications and references are satisfactory and there is the potential to offer appropriate supervision and provide the necessary facilities, that applicant may be offered an interview. International applications are directed to the International Office by the Graduate School in the first instance to ensure the necessary checks are completed. In the

[10] As determined by the UK National Information Centre for the recognition and evaluation of international qualifications and skills (UK ENIC): enic.org.uk.

case of competition for a limited number of places, a short-listing process may take place before the interview stage. The decision of the panel is reported to the Graduate School by the panel chair using a checklist form that ensures that panels consider all relevant matters. The panel may place conditions on the offer of a research degree place, which may include a requirement that further preparatory study be undertaken. The Graduate School ensures that the checklist has been completed satisfactorily before making an offer of a place.[11] All PhD, professional doctorate, and non-UK MRes applicants that are offered a place must have been interviewed. The decision as to whether to conduct an interview for UK MRes applicants is made by the relevant Graduate School research degree contact in consultation with the MRes Lead or, where necessary, the Graduate School. An interview is not a regulatory requirement because many MRes applicants are Edge Hill undergraduates at the time of application, and so are already known to the department or faculty in which they would be based and have discussed the proposal with appropriate Edge Hill staff. In such cases, an interview is unlikely to serve any useful purpose. The fact that an interview is not a regulatory requirement does not, however, in any way limit the ability of the Graduate School research degree contact to require an interview if it is necessary to establish whether a candidate should be offered a place and/or whether the University has the relevant supervisory capacity.

Applicants are made aware that admission to the University does not guarantee registration of the research project, as a PGR may develop a detailed research proposal that proves to be of insufficient quality or fails to meet the necessary academic requirements.

The initial stage of the programme consists in the PGRs developing a detailed research proposal, which is examined by three academics, including two with subject-specific expertise, to determine whether the project should be registered. In the case of the PhD and the professional doctorate, the project registration examination includes a viva. In the case of the MRes the proposal is shorter than those for doctoral projects and examination does not include a viva. Proposed supervisory teams are assessed against criteria (both for the composition of the team and individual membership of a supervisory team) by the Graduate School and, where necessary, revisions to teams may be required. If, during this process, it becomes apparent that the University cannot provide appropriate supervision or the facilities for its successful completion, the PGR will be encouraged to modify the proposal and given suitable guidance and support. A PGR that was unwilling to make such revisions would be supported to seek registration for a research degree at another university where appropriate supervision and facilities are available. Such an outcome is highly unlikely, however, because an assessment of supervisory requirements for the project as outlined at the point of application is made prior to the offer of a place. While plans can change as a full registration

[11] http://eshare.edgehill.ac.uk/11531/ illustrates the administrative checks that take place between interview and offer.

proposal is prepared, any PGR developing their project in a direction that would make supervision or the provision of suitable facilities impossible would be alerted to that danger by the supervisory team and could make adjustments accordingly.

Enrolment for research degrees at Edge Hill is at one of two enrolment points determined each year by the Graduate School. The enrolment points are usually at the beginning of October and the beginning of February. This not only helps ensure that PGRs are part of a cohort, but also means that all PGRs have the same experience in relation to researcher development and training opportunities, as they all have full access to the programme of sessions co-ordinated by the Graduate School, which is delivered twice per year. In certain very exceptional circumstances (related to some external funding conditions), and only in the case of the PhD, a PGR may be permitted to begin study at a specified date at another point in the academic year (the date being determined by the Graduate School in consultation with Academic Registry). That is not desirable, however, and is discouraged, because the programme of postgraduate researcher development is extensive and cannot be repeated for PGRs beginning their studies at an atypical point in the academic year. Such PGRs cannot, therefore, have the same quality of experience as PGRs beginning their studies at one of the standard enrolment points. To mitigate this state of affairs as much as possible, PGRs will only be accepted in such circumstances in cases where the relevant subject area demonstrates, to the satisfaction of the Graduate School, that it is able to provide alternative training and development activities to fully compensate (at least at the level of content, if not at that of discussion and interaction with other PGRs) for all sessions that the incoming PGR will miss as a result of the atypical enrolment point.

The Graduate School may accept applications for research degrees from candidates who wish to transfer from another UK research degree awarding institution where they are already registered, and from where their supervisor is moving to join the staff of Edge Hill. In such cases, evidence of progress from the candidate's previous institution will be used to inform a decision by the Graduate School regarding the point of registration, and the time remaining until progression or submission.

Each such case will be unique, so while the standard interview checklist is the minimum requirement in relation to documentation, additional documentary requirements may be established by the Graduate School in particular cases. In all cases, however, an admissions interview must be conducted – chaired by someone appointed to that role by the Graduate School, and the University's English language requirements must be met.

Approval, monitoring of review of supervisory teams and supervisory capacity[12]

A distinction is made between those supervisors required to meet the stipulations of the Research Degree Regulations and those with a supervisory role additional to the core regulatory requirements.[13] Supervisors contributing to meeting the regulatory requirements for the composition of a supervisory team for doctoral PGRs must be active researchers currently involved in the production of peer-reviewed publications, and with a recent record of such publications.[14] Edge Hill University doctoral PGRs each have a supervisory team consisting of at least two, but normally not more than three, supervisors, two of whom will be internal to the institution and at least one will have previous experience of successful supervision at doctoral level. Collectively, the supervisory team will demonstrate active engagement in research, bringing to the support of the PGR a range of skills and knowledge relevant to the project.

One member of the supervisory team, who will be a permanent member of staff of the University, will be designated as Director of Studies. The Director of Studies has responsibility to ensure supervision of the candidate on a regular and frequent basis and manages the supervisory team. Other members of the team will have specific subject and/or methodological expertise and may, occasionally, be drawn from outside the University when absolutely necessary.

MRes PGRs will standardly have one supervisor, but some may have a team of two supervisors where a combination of the expertise of two members of staff is necessary.

Initial proposals for supervisory teams are made by Graduate School research degree contacts. Those are considered against criteria by the Graduate School, and amendments made, in consultation with research degree contacts and departments and faculties, when necessary. Following the project registration examination process supervisory teams are confirmed by the Graduate School. This process of making initial proposals in relation to the supervisory team and later confirmation after the project has been fully designed and approved, ensures that if the design of a project alters during the course of the preparation

[12] Candidates for PhD by publication are not registered PGRs, and do not have supervisors. Such candidates sometimes have mentors appointed from among the staff of the University, but that is an informal advisory role and does not constitute supervision.
[13] The core regulatory requirements for the composition of a doctoral supervisory team are two members of Edge Hill University staff, one of whom must have previously supervised at least one doctorate to successful completion.
[14] An external supervisor from a relevant profession (and so not an academic) may be added as a third member of a supervisory team.

of the project registration research proposal in such a way that the initial supervisory team is not suitable, adjustments can be made to the team immediately.

If it becomes necessary to alter a supervisory team at any time after confirmation of the team, an application is considered by the Graduate School.

Assurance of the quality of supervision provided for the University's doctoral PGRs rests with the Graduate School and GSBoS. It is for that reason that the Graduate School must approve any permanent changes to supervisory arrangements. Where a change is necessitated by the ill-health, retirement or other long-term unavailability of a member of the supervisory team, appropriate alternative arrangements must be proposed by the relevant research degree contact and any such arrangements must be organised to ensure that the PGR is not disadvantaged in project progression.

There will inevitably be situations where difficulties arise in the relationship between PGR and supervisor. Where this is the case, the parties should initially seek to resolve these informally by involving, where he or she is not part of the situation, the Director of Studies in a mediating role. Where this proves impossible or the issue remains unresolved, the Graduate School should be contacted. The Graduate School will then resolve matters, and changes may be made to supervisory arrangements by the Graduate School.

While supervisory difficulties can be brought to the attention of the Graduate School at any time of the year, the annual appraisal process provides an opportunity to monitor supervision on a regular basis. As part of that process PGRs and Directors of Studies (on behalf of the supervisory team) each write separate reports on the PGR's progress, which can assist the Graduate School in identifying difficulties in relation to supervision. When such difficulties are identified by those means they are taken to GSBoS for consideration if the Graduate School is unable to informally resolve any issue.

The Graduate School regularly monitors supervisory capacity across the University. Such monitoring considers both the supervisory load of individual members of staff (which is not normally permitted to rise, in the most extreme cases, above nine PGRs in total, a maximum of six of which can be doctoral PGRs),[15] and the capacity within subject areas. This involves not only considering the supervisory load of individual staff, but also the requirements for internal examiners, which must also be taken into account in assessing supervisory capacity, as examiners cannot have had any involvement in the supervision of PGRs whom they examine. Graduate School research degree contacts are responsible for monitoring supervisory capacity within their subject area, but the Graduate School also monitors capacity

[15] Those figures are maximums for the most experienced supervisors, not a standard supervisory load. Many supervisors will not be permitted such a load.

independently. In addition, capacity is considered on every occasion on which a supervisory team is approved.

The Graduate School has various options available to it in identifying suitable supervisory teams. In addition to the standard supervisory role (research active staff of the University contributing to meeting the regulatory requirements for a supervisory team), the Graduate School may appoint a supervisory team mentor. Individuals allocated such a role will be experienced supervisors with significant experience of supervising at the relevant level to successful completion. Supervisory team mentors may contribute to meeting the requirement for two members of Edge Hill University staff on a doctoral supervisory team, but often they may not conduct their own research in the relevant discipline. Where a supervisory team mentor is drawn from a different discipline there will be a third member of the supervisory team, usually external to the University, with relevant subject knowledge and experience in addition to the Director of Studies and the supervisory team mentor. Supervisory team mentors will primarily focus on assisting, mentoring, and advising the other members of the supervisory team, but may also advise the PGR. Supervisory team mentors will be credited with completions along with other members of the supervisory team, but their responsibilities as supervisory team mentors are additional to their supervisory workload as standard supervisors on other teams. The role of supervisory team mentor is not included in calculations of supervisory capacity. It is the responsibility of the Graduate School to ensure that supervisory team mentors have sufficient time to perform their duties.

Some supervisors (those with no previous experience of supervision to successful completion) may be designated as having a developmental supervisory status. In such cases, the person occupying such a role will be a third member of the supervisory team, additional to those necessary to meet the regulatory requirements for a supervisory team.

Where there is a formal partnership between Edge Hill University and another institution, one member of Edge Hill staff and one member of staff of the partner institution shall constitute a supervisory team by the requirements of the Research Degree Regulations. The Graduate School will decide in each case whether to appoint a supervisory team mentor in addition to those two supervisors. Where there is no such formal partnership, external supervisors will be a third, or in rare cases, fourth, supervisor and so not be part of the core members of the team necessary to meet the regulatory requirements.

Postgraduate researcher development

Postgraduate researcher development takes five different forms:[16]

I. Core postgraduate researcher development sessions (mandatory for all new PGRs)
II. Methodological development sessions (mandatory for all new MRes and professional doctorate PGRs, and available for inclusion in a programme of related studies for all PhD PGRs)
III. Additional postgraduate researcher development sessions (mandatory for all new PhD PGRs, but available to all PGRs for inclusion in a programme of related studies)
IV. Professional doctorate subject-specific development sessions (mandatory for all professional doctorate PGRs)
V. The individual programme of related studies designed by the PGR and his or her supervisor(s) (mandatory for all PGRs).

The design and delivery of the core and additional postgraduate researcher development sessions is co-ordinated by the Associate Dean of the Graduate School in consultation with the MRes Lead, the Professional Doctorate Leads, the Graduate School Researcher Development Fellows (of which there are three – one each for social science, science, and arts & humanities), and the Graduate School research degree contacts for each subject area. The design of the core postgraduate researcher development programme is informed by benchmarking and consideration of evaluations of previous training. As part of the evaluation of all postgraduate researcher development, PGRs are asked whether there are any topics they feel should be added to the programme. These suggestions are reviewed by the Associate Dean of the Graduate School and presented for consideration to the Research Degrees Sub-Committee where appropriate.

The design and delivery of the methodological development programme is co-ordinated by the MRes Lead and overseen by the Associate Dean of the Graduate School. The three Graduate School Researcher Development Fellows consult with staff in their respective broad disciplinary categories (social science, science, and arts & humanities), and propose content for six sessions in each broad disciplinary category. In addition, some cross-disciplinary topics are identified and included in the programme as extra sessions.

[16] Detailed descriptions of the different forms of research student development sessions and the specific schedules can be found in the Research Degree Handbook: http://eshare.edgehill.ac.uk/15194/

The design and delivery of subject-specific development for the professional doctorates is coordinated by the Professional Doctorate Leads, who are also responsible for evaluation of such sessions.

All postgraduate researcher development activities are evaluated annually by the Graduate School.

Approval of project registration

The GSBoS is the body that formally approves a programme of research as being appropriate for a PGR seeking the award of an Edge Hill University research degree. In making its decision, however, the Board takes the advice of the relevant examination panel.[17] This panel generally comprises two research-active members of staff, one of whom will normally be a member of the PGR's proposed supervisory team and one of whom will be appointed as chair in accordance with the Research Degree Regulations. The panel provides a written report containing a recommendation to GSBoS. The recommendation and paperwork are considered by GSBoS. Exceptions to the above arrangements for panel membership require the approval of the Chair of the GSBoS.

The examination panel's recommendation is one of the following:

I. The project should be registered at the level of the degree sought;
II. The project should not be registered at the present time. The PGR should revise and resubmit the proposal for re-examination (with a viva for doctoral degrees);[18]
III. Following a re-examination, the submission is not of an appropriate standard, so the project should not be registered (the PGR's enrolment will therefore be terminated by the Board); or
IV. The PGR should be considered under the University's malpractice regulations.

Should the panel recommend that the project should not be registered, the PGR has one opportunity to re-submit a proposal and be re-examined.

In order to determine that any particular project is an appropriate one to be pursued by a specific PGR for a research degree of Edge Hill University, the GSBoS must satisfy itself that:

I. the PGR is suitably qualified;
II. the programme of research submitted by the applicant is viable and appropriate to the standard of the award sought;

[17] http://eshare.edgehill.ac.uk/12124/ contains project registration processes, guidance, and examination paperwork.
[18] Where the PGR's original submission was made after the submission deadline, the initial examination must be considered a second sitting. Under such circumstances, the option to offer revise and resubmit is not available.

III. the supervisory arrangements are adequate and sustainable in terms of the programme requirements;
IV. appropriate resources and facilities are available for the conduct of the programme of research;
V. ethical approval has been, or is in the process of being, obtained where appropriate; and,
VI. where a project is wholly or partly funded by an external agency or there is a collaborating institution, this does not inhibit the fulfilment of the objectives of the project and/or the academic requirements of the research degree, nor potentially give rise to a conflict of interest with the University. Formal written agreement from any collaborating organisation is required before registration can be approved.

Research proposals are assessed against the following criteria:

By the end of the examination, the examiners should be satisfied that the PGR can:

1. Demonstrate detailed knowledge and understanding of appropriate research methodologies in designing the research;
2. Demonstrate appropriate research project management skills, and critically reflect on those skills (must have included a research project management plan in the submission);
3. Demonstrate sensitivity to, and understanding of, ethical and other values. Has planned for and identified a relevant, specific, Research Ethics Committee meeting date at which ethical approval will be sought;
4. Articulate and defend a scholarly argument at the relevant postgraduate level;
5. Critically reflect on the methodological choices made in designing the research;
6. Demonstrate advanced critical ability to appraise, reflect and evaluate in relation to both subject knowledge and research skills development;
7. Demonstrate a capacity for advanced critical, theoretical and conceptual reflection upon subject matter of relevance to their area of study;
8. Demonstrate advanced knowledge and skills in relation to research design;
9. Provide rigorous and convincing evidence that the project is feasible and of an appropriate level for the research degree for which registration is sought;
10. Demonstrate proficiency in written English and display academic writing skills to the appropriate level for the relevant research degree (assessed via submission only);
11. Demonstrate an advanced ability to defend their proposed research design;
12. Demonstrate the ability to produce a research data management (RDM) plan that both respects subject confidentiality and ensures data is reusable where appropriate (must have included the plan in the submission);
13. Demonstrate that they have completed:
    I. a learning and skills needs analysis;

II. designed a programme of related studies that reflects the identified needs, and
III. completed the programme of postgraduate researcher development activities appropriate to the research degree or have identified suitable equivalent development activities to undertake (which must be approved in advance by the Graduate School).

If all of these criteria are met, there is no reason not to recommend registration of the project.

Ethical scrutiny and approval

Research proposals must adhere to the Research Ethics Policy.[19] No primary research or data collection may start until a proposal has gained the appropriate ethical approval.

Progression viva

In relation to doctoral work, the progression submission and subsequent viva provides an opportunity to confirm, in a formal setting, the robustness of the ideas developed in a PGR's research and their preparedness for a final viva examination, subsequent to the submission of a completed thesis.[20] This provides the Graduate School, through the GSBoS acting on its behalf, with an opportunity to assure itself that the project is of such a character as to allow the development of a thesis of a quality appropriate to submission for examination. It also allows the Graduate School, again acting through the GSBoS, to assure itself that the PGR is making intellectual developments appropriate to examination at the relevant level. Supervisors can also observe their PGR's performance in this formal setting, identify any areas where additional support is required and help to prepare them for the final examination. The progression viva, therefore, performs a number of important functions for all parties to the research degree.

Both part- and full-time doctoral PGRs must submit a progression application to the Graduate School. Normally, an application should be submitted no later than eighteen months from enrolment for full-time PGRs, or thirty-six months for part-time, and applications must be supported by the supervisory team. An application must be accompanied by a report of no more than 6,000 words outlining:

I. Progress to date in the literature review, methodological development and data collection;
II. The original contribution to knowledge that will be made by the research;

[19] 2020 - 2023 policy link - https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/research-ethics-policy/
[20] http://eshare.edgehill.ac.uk/12123/ denotes progression processes, guidance, and examination paperwork.

III. The written work to date,[21] its form and whether it has been seen and commented on by supervisors;
IV. The timetable for thesis submission;
V. A detailed plan of the final thesis structure.

Applications are assessed by an examination panel, appointed on behalf of the Graduate School. The panel comprises two research-active members of staff, no more than one of whom will be a member of the supervisory team. One member will be external to the University and at least one of the examiners will have experience of supervising at least one PhD to successful completion. In some cases an independent chair will be appointed, but the internal examiner will act as chair where that person has completed research degree viva chair training. Amendment to these arrangements requires the approval of the Chair of the GSBoS or the Dean of the Graduate School and will only be given where exceptional mitigating circumstances apply.

On completion of the viva, the examination panel will prepare a report making one of the following recommendations to the GSBoS:

I. The application to progress be approved;
II. Progression should not be permitted at the present time. The candidate should revise and resubmit the application for re-examination *without* a second viva;
III. Progression should not be permitted at the present time. The candidate should revise and resubmit the application for re-examination *with* a second viva;
IV. Following a re-examination, the submission is not of an appropriate standard, so the candidate should not progress (the candidate's registration will therefore be terminated by the Board); or
V. The candidate should be considered under the University's malpractice regulations.

The GSBoS will make the final decision and where a referral by the examination panel is confirmed by the Board, a PGR is permitted a period of no more than eight weeks (for full-time PGRs) or twelve weeks (for part-time PGRs) to make a re-submission. In the case of a decision to refer an application for further work, written feedback will be provided by the panel chair for transmission to the PGR. In the event that a panel has not included a member of the PGR's supervisory team, the written feedback will also be provided to the supervisors.

Only one re-submission of a progression application is permitted and where an application is rejected for a second time registration will be terminated. PGRs who are refused permission

[21] The written work should normally comprise at least one draft chapter of the thesis. Where work has already been published, the candidate might find it helpful to make reference to the appropriate publication(s).

to progress at the second submission may appeal under the Appeals Procedure described within the Research Degree Regulations.

The MRes does not include a formal progression *examination*, but it does have a formal review of the academic progress of all PGRs through a process co-ordinated by the MRes Lead on behalf of the Graduate School. The process is outlined in the *Research Degree Handbook*.[22] The reports are considered by a panel drawn from the MRes co-ordinators, and also including the MRes Lead and, where necessary, the Associate Dean of the Graduate School.

Changes to registration

All changes to registration are by application and subject to the approval of the Graduate School. These changes include:

I. Change to mode of study[23]
II. Interruption of study
III. Extension to the period of registration and to submission deadlines
IV. Change in award level

In order to be considered by the Graduate School, any request for a change to registration must be supported in writing by the supervisory team.

Change to mode of study

Mode of study has different implications in research degrees from those it has in taught programmes because of the specificity of the research project and the requirements in relation to supervisory expertise. As a consequence, changes to mode of study cannot simply be granted whenever a request is made, but rather the Graduate School must consider the implications of granting such a request. Standardly, that will involve considering whether a change from full-time to part-time study will adversely affect the capacity of a supervisor or the University more generally to supervise other PGRs, including the capacity to admit new PGRs. Those issues are related to the allocation of (human) resources and planning, as the decision to admit a PGR is based on an assessment of the required resources, including human resources, for the period of registration originally proposed. Granting a request for a change from full-time to part-time registration could, if that request was made at the beginning of the period of registration, add three years to the time a supervisor is occupied in the supervision of a PGR. In addition, in relation to some projects, the Graduate School may ask the supervisory team to make an assessment of whether the currency of the research will be adversely affected by the delay to completion that a change of mode of study can bring.

[22] http://eshare.edgehill.ac.uk/15194/
[23] For example, from part-time to full-time.

Interruption of study

Where a PGR is prevented from making progress with their programme of research because of illness or other reasonable cause, they may seek an interruption of study; PGRs are permitted, in extenuating circumstances, to interrupt studies (intercalate) for a minimum of three months (90 days) and a maximum period of twelve months (365 days) in total across the entirety of their registration period in the case of the PhD and professional doctorate, and a minimum of 60 days and a maximum of 90 days in the case of the MRes. It is unusual for a PGR to be granted periods of interruption totalling more than twelve months during the registration although exceptions to this may be made by the Graduate School acting within its discretion. Approved periods of interruption will not be included in calculating the PGR's period of registration for the purpose of determining minimum and maximum periods. Applications for interruption of registration must be supported by evidence and a considered explanation of the circumstances that will prevent completion within the normal timescale.

Extension to the period of registration and to submission deadlines

Requests to extend the period of registration beyond the maximum period normally allowed will be considered by the Graduate School, which will consider the request in the context of the progress made to date, the reason for the request for additional time, and its assessment of the likelihood of eventual submission of a thesis or dissertation appropriate for examination for the degree for which a PGR is registered.

An extension will normally only be made for a maximum 90-day period and requests that extensions should take effect retrospectively will only be granted should the Graduate School consider that sufficient justification has been provided to explain why such a course of action is necessary, and why a timely prospective application was not made.

The Graduate School also considers requests for extensions to examination submission deadlines. Again, PGRs must provide an appropriate reason for the request, and the Graduate School considers the impact of granting the request on the PGR's ability to complete the research degree within the timeframe specified by the Research Degree Regulations, because the extension of examination submission deadlines does not lead to an extension of the period of registration.

Change in award level

Should a PGR who has registered for the degree of PhD or professional doctorate be unable to complete the requirements of the award or seek to exit before submission for a doctorate, he or she may apply for the registration to be remitted to MRes. In such cases the Graduate School will satisfy itself that the standard of award applied for is appropriate and can be met. PGRs enrolled on the MRes cannot apply for a change in award level because there is no lower

level of research degree, and the University does not offer the opportunity for MRes PGRs to transfer to a higher level of research degree.

Withdrawal and termination of registration for an Edge Hill University research degree

If a PGR ends his or her registration, that is a withdrawal. If the University ends a PGR's registration, that is a termination of registration. Where the Graduate School becomes aware that a PGR has withdrawn their registration for a research degree it will notify the supervisory team, the appropriate Graduate School research degree contact and the department or faculty in which the PGR was based.

Where a supervisory team becomes aware that a PGR has withdrawn their registration for a research degree it will notify the Graduate School.

In either event, the Graduate School and the GSBoS must be notified of any PGR who has withdrawn.

In the event that the Graduate School is of the opinion that a PGR is not making satisfactory academic progress and/or it is evident that he or she is no longer in contact with her/his supervisory team, the Graduate School may formally take the initiative and employ the procedures outlined in Schedule F of the Research Degree Regulations, which could lead to termination of registration. The decision to terminate registration can only be made by GSBoS. Normally where there are concerns identified by the supervisory team or through the various monitoring processes, the PGR's progress will be placed under review for a specified period of time before termination of registration is considered, however, the formal process for review of PGR progress is not required in all circumstances (such as lack of engagement on the part of a PGR, some fitness to study or malpractice cases, etc.), and the Board can terminate registration at any point if the relevant conditions are deemed by the Board to have been met.[24] Termination of registration may also result where the Research Degree Fitness to Study Procedures (Schedule G of the Research Degree Regulations) are employed or in some cases of academic malpractice (which are covered by Schedule B of the Research Degree Regulations).

In the case of both withdrawal and termination of registration, the Graduate School will notify Academic Registry, which will follow its standard process.

Monitoring of PGR progress

The University operates an appraisal system in relation to research degree registrations involving both the PGR and the Director of Studies (on behalf of the supervisory team). Both

[24] http://eshare.edgehill.ac.uk/9099/ outlines the progress review process.

are required to independently complete a pro forma and provide a written report. The reports are considered through a Graduate School process that results in those cases judged in need of consideration being referred to the GSBoS. The appraisal is required for PGRs who have not submitted work for a viva thus far in the calendar year. The documentation from the supervisory team includes a recommendation in relation to continued enrolment in the next academic session and, should it be evident to the GSBoS that a PGR is failing to make satisfactory progress or failing to respond appropriately to feedback, the Board may terminate their registration under the Research Degree Regulations or place the PGR's progress under review. Any PGR who is denied progression or whose registration is terminated under these regulations may appeal on procedural grounds using the University's Appeals Procedures.[25]

The appointment of examiners

Examination teams are nominated by the supervisory team but are appointed by the Graduate School. The Director of Studies for a PGR is responsible for submitting proposals for the examination team to the Graduate School at least three months prior to the proposed date of the examination.

Each PGR is examined by an examination team of at least two examiners. Each examination team includes at least one internal, and one external examiner. An examination team may not include more than three examiners.

With some exceptions, which are outlined in the Research Degree Regulations, where the PGR being examined is a permanent or full-time member of staff of either Edge Hill University, a designated research partner institution of the University or a collaborating institution as designated on the approved research degree project registration documentation, an additional external examiner is required (this does not apply in the case of Graduate Teaching Assistants).

The examining team must collectively have experience of a minimum of two previous examinations of PGRs at the level of the award being examined. Examiners must be experienced in research in the general area of the PGR's thesis and, where practicable, will have specialist experience in the particular topic that is the subject of examination. This is particularly important for the external members of the examination team.

For a professional doctorate, at least one member of the examining team must have appropriate experience of working in the profession. Whilst it is preferable to invite an academic with such experience to join the examining team, it is acknowledged that this will not always be possible. In such cases the practitioner will be a third (and external) examiner. Thus, a team may comprise an internal academic, an external academic (for benchmarking of

[25] https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/graduateschool/regulations/.

standards), and finally an external practitioner. At least one of the examiners must be familiar with professional doctorates.

It is extremely important that the external examiners must be, and must be seen to be, independent of the University, the department in which the PGR has pursued his or her research, any research partner or collaborating institution and the research project upon which the PGR's thesis is based. This means that an external examiner may not have acted previously as the PGR's supervisor or advisor, nor be either a supervisor of another PGR or, during the previous three years, have been an external examiner on a taught course in the same department in which the PGR is based. Additionally, the Graduate School acts to ensure that an external examiner is not appointed with such frequency that familiarity with the University might be considered prejudicial to objective judgement.

While it is not possible to require the same degree of independence of the internal examiner as it is of external examiners, the University does not allow a member of staff who is, or has been, the PGR's supervisor or formal advisor to be a member of the examination team for that PGR.

Appointment of viva chairs

The Graduate School appoints an independent and suitably experienced member of staff to chair the viva and who may make personal contemporaneous notes in relation to the process of the viva. These notes are retained by the chair and cannot be destroyed until the period for appeal has expired. Viva chairs (for project registration, progression and final vivas) are drawn from a standing panel of staff, the members of which have completed viva chair training provided by the Graduate School. Chairs must be entirely independent of the project, and the department or faculty in which the PGR is based.

Final examination

The final examination of Edge Hill University's research degrees[26] involves two stages and a degree cannot be awarded until both have been completed. These stages are:

I. the submission and preliminary assessment of the thesis or, in the case of the MRes, the dissertation;
II. the defence of the thesis or dissertation by oral examination (or approved alternative).

In the case of doctoral degrees, following three years of full-time enrolment or four-and-a-half years of part-time enrolment, submission of a thesis is the sole responsibility of the PGR. Should a PGR wish to submit prior to the conclusion of that period of enrolment, the prior approval of the supervisors is required. In such cases, when they approve submission the

[26] http://eshare.edgehill.ac.uk/id/document/31902 illustrates the process for final examination.

supervisors are confirming that the thesis is of an appropriate standard to merit examination. A supervisor's agreement to the submission of a thesis does not ensure its approval by the examiners, nor can it be used as grounds for appeal against the outcome of an examination or introduced as evidence in any such appeal.

All theses and dissertations must be submitted in English and all oral examinations will be conducted in English. Oral examinations will normally be held on mainland Britain with exceptions being approved by the Chair of the GSBoS. Requests for final examination using video conferencing are permitted. In such cases all individuals involved in the examination must agree to the request. Progression examinations are standardly conducted using video conferencing.

In order to maintain a degree of distance between participants in the examination of a thesis, PGRs may not take any part in the formal arrangements for the examination nor have any formal contact with the external examiners between their appointment and the oral examination (or approved alternative).

The Graduate School will ensure that the conduct of examinations and the presentation of the examiners' recommendations are undertaken in accordance with the University's Research Degree Regulations. Within the viva, the independent chair plays this role and reports any concerns to the Graduate School. Where the GSBoS is made aware of a failure to comply with the specified procedures, the examination may be declared invalid and new examiners appointed.

Assessment of the thesis takes place in two stages. Each examiner independently makes a preliminary report, which must be submitted prior to any communication between the examiners about the thesis. This pre-viva report should include a preliminary recommendation. Examiners are required not to consult with each other in the preparation of the pre-viva reports. When all the reports have been received, the examiners are free to discuss the thesis and how they would like to approach the examination.

In their preliminary reports, examiners are at liberty to recommend that no useful purpose would be served by conducting an oral examination (or approved alternative). Where the examiners are agreed in this, they will provide written guidance on the deficiencies of the thesis for the PGR, who will then have a period of no more than twelve months in the case of the PhD and professional doctorate or 90 days in the case of the MRes to revise the thesis for re-examination. Where the preliminary recommendations from the external examiners are not in agreement, the viva chair, or, where necessary, the Graduate School, will consult with all the examiners to reach a decision as to whether to proceed with the oral examination (or approved alternative).

Following an oral examination (or approved alternative) the examiners will, where they are in agreement, prepare a joint report and recommendation to the GSBoS and, where the recommendation is to make the award, certify that the thesis meets the criteria for the award. The recommendations that the examiners may make are set down in the Research Degree Regulations.

Where the examiners are not in agreement following the oral examination (or approved alternative), each examiner will prepare a separate report and recommendation, and these will be considered by the GSBoS. The Board will determine one of the following outcomes, which must be considered in the order listed here with the first possible option adopted:

I. to accept a majority recommendation provided that such recommendation includes the views of at least one external examiner;
II. to accept the recommendation of the external examiner;
III. to require the appointment of an additional external examiner;
IV. to require the appointment of a new examining team;

In exceptional cases, where the Board feels that an examination has been conducted within the regulations, but that the examiners have failed to make a recommendation that is consistent with the regulations, or with their own comments on the work, the Board may not follow the recommendation of an examination panel. In such cases, the Board may make an award without a further examination.

Only one re-examination for a research degree award is permitted and the Graduate School may, where it is satisfied that just cause exists, approve an extension to the re-submission timescales detailed in the Research Degree Regulations. In the event of a re-examination, where possible, the examining team responsible for the final recommendation from the first examination will operate for re-examination, except that the GSBoS may require that an additional external examiner be appointed if it believes that to be necessary under the circumstances pertaining at the time of re-examination. If it is not possible to conduct the second examination with the panel from the first viva, the Board may simply allow a replacement without requiring an additional examiner. Examiners are required to complete preliminary report forms as detailed above.

Following the re-examination, the examiners will agree a written report and recommendation to the GSBoS. The recommendations available to the examiners in the event of a re-examination, and the process to be followed in the event of disagreement within the examination team, can be found in the Research Degree Regulations.

PhD by publication

The term ‘PhD by publication’ describes the route that a candidate takes to reach the examination for a PhD but does not in any way imply different learning outcomes. Another

important feature of the PhD by publication is that it is *an opportunity*, rather than a programme of research. The PhD by publication route provides eligible staff, or former staff meeting certain requirements, with the opportunity to submit a body of published work and an analytical commentary on that work for consideration for the award of a PhD. That is quite different from the other routes to an Edge Hill research degree (PhD, professional doctorate and MRes), which are specified routes by which an enrolled *PGR* of the University can engage in a programme of research, which he or she designs, having considered the advice of supervisors, and a programme of postgraduate researcher development activity. In the case of the PhD by publication candidates never have the status of PGR, do not follow a programme of postgraduate researcher development activity, do not conduct a programme of research (as the research has already been completed and published), and do not receive supervision, although they do receive the relatively informal advice of a mentor in relation to the preparation of the analytical commentary and perhaps also the selection of published work to include in the submission.

The distinctiveness of the route is that the thesis comprises a coherent portfolio of both the candidate's[27] published work and an associated analytical commentary, which identifies the candidate's original contribution to knowledge. The formal examination of the published work and analytical commentary is in the form of a viva (or approved alternative), in exactly the same manner as for candidates who have submitted a single dissertation.

The defining feature of this route to a PhD is that the prospective candidate has already conducted research, and the outputs have been made available in the public domain.

The University takes a view on the appropriateness of the prospective candidate's publications using a staged approach:

Stage 1: establishing the *prima facie* case;

Stage 2: production of an analytical commentary and portfolio; and

Stage 3: assessment by viva.

The first stage may be regarded as a speculative enquiry, which aims to establish whether the research outputs might make sufficient contribution to warrant assessment for a PhD. The Graduate School takes formal advice from an external peer subject advisor before considering whether or not to approve progression to the second stage.

It is during the second stage that prospective candidates make the detailed case regarding the coherence and originality of their published work. The submission of the analytical commentary and portfolio of work marks the point at which candidature is formally

[27] Restricted to current staff and previous members of staff of the University who meet certain criteria.

recognised by the Graduate School, with the appointment of the final PhD viva panel. The candidate is not considered to be a PGR of the University, as the research has already been completed.

The Graduate School has produced detailed guidance for prospective candidates and makes them available to staff at the appropriate time. The Dean of the Graduate School offers informal support to prospective candidates.

Assessment is conducted in accordance with the University's normal regulations for PhDs. The only notable difference is that, as the assessment is of previously *published* work, the examination team cannot require further work to be undertaken before a re-submission. Thus, whilst minor changes may be required in the candidate's analytical commentary, a decision that further research is required leads to a decision not to award the PhD. The candidate is, however, permitted to make a new application for candidature in no fewer than three years, by which time their portfolio of published work will have developed further, which may therefore lead to a more successful conclusion.

Academic malpractice

The nature and purpose of the research degree means that academic malpractice is a particularly important issue for those involved in its delivery. The University's Research Degree Regulations address both the issue of what constitutes malpractice and how allegations of this nature are dealt with (specifically identified in Schedule B of the Regulations).[28]

All PGRs must adhere to the University's Code of Practice for Research. If an individual suspects misconduct, he or she should refer to the Code of Practice for the Investigation of Research Misconduct.[29]

Academic appeals

If PGRs feel that they have suitable grounds for appeal, they may appeal Graduate School Board of Studies decisions relating to progression and award, or malpractice, under the terms of the Academic Appeals Procedure set out in the general academic regulations.[30]

Of particular note is the fact that, under the Research Degree Regulations, all recommendations of examination teams that a candidate should fail a research degree, or recommendations that an award should be made at a lower level than that for which a thesis

[28] https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/research-degree-regulations/
[29] These codes are available for download from https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/code-of-practice-for-the-conduct-of-research/ and https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/code-practice- reporting-research-misconduct/ .
[30] https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/collection/academic-regulations/academic-regulations-2021-22/

was presented for examination, will automatically be reviewed for process and procedure by the Graduate School.

Complaints

If a PGR has a complaint regarding provision by the University, the University has a published Complaints Procedure.[31] PGRs are strongly advised to seek the free advice and support of the Students' Union. Complaints must be lodged within three months of the incident occurring for it to be investigated.

PGR representation and PGR experience

Postgraduate researcher representatives are appointed by the Graduate School each year following the invitation to all PGRs to make expressions of interest. Those roles are not Students' Union roles, but rather roles created by the Graduate School for developmental purposes to ensure PGR involvement in discussions about the development of research degrees while also enabling the Graduate School to have accurate information about the experience of PGRs that can inform decision-making. One of the postgraduate researcher representatives attends Research Degrees Sub-Committee and an item on the agenda is devoted to a report on the activities of the postgraduate researcher representatives and discussion of any issues raised. The Graduate School operates a three-level process for reporting and addressing student experience matters.[32] That process directs matters to the appropriate part of the University for resolution. For example, individual problems are quite different from general PGR experience matters and must be dealt with in a very different way, not least because they can raise a need for confidentiality. Equally, certain matters, such as those concerning the GTA studentship scheme sometimes prove to be things which require action in the departments or faculties in which a GTA is based for teaching purposes. The aim of the three-level process is to identify the correct path so that all matters are addressed by the most appropriate individuals.

In addition to addressing any institutional level matters that arise from the three-level process, the Graduate School evaluates all feedback collected from the postgraduate researcher representatives who meet with the Associate Dean of the Graduate School on a termly basis. Following a review of the efficacy of the PRES survey in 2021, the Associate Dean of the Graduate School proposed departmental focus group interviews as a more tailored means by which feedback from all PGRs could be garnered. The focus group outcomes are reported to the last Research Degrees Sub-Committee each academic year and any actions taken as a result of the focus groups are reported to the next Research Degrees Sub-

[31] https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/complaints-procedure/
[32] http://eshare.edgehill.ac.uk/15194/

Committee. These actions are communicated to all PGRs and supervisors via the Graduate School monthly newsletter.

PGRs with teaching responsibilities

The Graduate Teaching Assistant studentship scheme is an institutional scheme coordinated by the Graduate School with the assistance of Human Resources, the faculties and the departments in which PGRs in receipt of a studentship are based. The Graduate School works closely with the faculties and the PVC (Research) to ensure that the requirements of the scheme do not have a detrimental impact on the ability of the GTAs to complete their research degrees within the timeframes specified in the Research Degree Regulations. Throughout, the Graduate School ensures that the requirements imposed by the system of funding research studentships do not in any way disadvantage PGRs in receipt of a studentship, particularly those that involve teaching. Equally, the Graduate School Board of Studies requires that, if a PGR does not meet the required academic standards, the fact that PGR is in receipt of a studentship has no bearing on the decision-making process in relation to the PGR's progress.

Employability

The centrality of the Researcher Development Framework to the experience of PGRs at Edge Hill means that the skills and attributes standardly developed by a fully trained researcher in the course of completing a research degree are developed in such a way as to maximise the employability of research degree graduates. In addition, a particular set of development sessions provided by the Graduate School is principally focussed on preparing PGRs for careers in academia and research more widely.

Working with third parties

The University, on occasion, identifies expert individuals from outside the University, who have the most appropriate expertise to supervise the programme of research. In such cases the University provides appropriate remuneration to the individual including a small annual honorarium, further renumeration for each supervisory meeting they attend at the University up to a maximum of four meetings per year, and expenses as outlined in the University's financial policies.[33]

Research degrees and collaborating institutions

Whenever a programme of research leading to the award of a research degree is conducted in partnership with, or with the support of, another organisation, the University must be made aware of, and agree to, the details at the point of registration of the programme of work.

[33] https://go.edgehill.ac.uk/display/finance/Policy+and+Procedures

There are typically three types of collaborating arrangement:

1. **Guaranteed access to physical resources.**

Such cases might, for example, involve granting access to private or public archive material, to data from fieldwork conducted by the partner organisation, to specialist computing facilities or to specialist laboratory equipment.

In such cases access is likely to be central to the successful completion of the research work, and the Graduate School is required to ensure that access is guaranteed.

The Graduate School thus requires a written commitment from the collaborator/partner that defines the rights of access to resources in order to make an appropriate decision, and which will be considered by the Graduate School Board of Studies at the point of project registration.

2. **Partnerships**

Academic partnerships[34] are those where Edge Hill University and another educational organisation enter into a formal agreement to work together, and within which a research degree forms an element of the work. Such arrangements are relatively rare because the University has not hitherto entered such collaborations in the case of research degrees.

Research collaborations, where a partner organisation has any responsibility for delivery, assessment or supervision of a research award, will be categorised according to the University's partnership taxonomy[35]. Whilst certain responsibilities for managing academic standards and the quality of assessment, student support and/or supervision may be delegated to a partner, ultimate responsibility for standards and quality reside with the University's as awarding body.

The processes for managing the approval, monitoring and management of such partnerships reside with the Graduate School and are fully aligned with the Quality and Standards Conditions B1 to B5 of the Office for Students' (OfS) Regulatory Framework for Higher Education in England[36].

The University requires formal partnership agreements to be made whenever an external partner organisation bears any responsibility for the 'delivery or assessment' of any award-bearing academic activity.

No research degree registration can be approved until a formal agreement between the partners has been produced and signed. Such partnerships vary considerably, and there is no

[34] For a more detailed definition, including the University's taxonomy of academic partnerships, see Chapter 5.
[35] See the University's taxonomy of academic partnerships, Chapter 5.
[36] https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/regulation/registration-with-the-ofs-a-guide/conditions-of-registration/.

standard template to follow. The Graduate School works with the Research Office in the preparation of such agreements.

The agreement must include responsibilities for resourcing, supervision and examination; financial arrangements; arrangements for late or early termination of the agreement; arrangements for agreeing variation to the programme of research; arrangements for seeking ethical approval for the work; arrangements for reporting progress and outcomes of the work; confidentiality; and ownership of intellectual property arising from the research.

The Graduate School should consider the agreement before it is signed.

3. Research degree funding provided by an external organisation

Those are cases where an external organisation provides funding which will be used, in full or in part, to support a programme of research leading to a research degree.

In these cases, the University and funding body have generally entered a formal agreement where the funding body provides financial support for a predetermined programme of research. Such arrangements include research council grants and contract research.

Funders must agree to cover the costs between enrolment and project registration, and if the PGR fails to successfully negotiate the project registration examination process, or, indeed, the progression examination process, or the PGR's registration is terminated for any reason, or the PGR withdraws, the agreement ends, and the University returns any unspent funds. Such agreements vary considerably, and there is no standard template to follow. The Graduate School works with the Research Office in the preparation of such agreements.

These agreements generally include: financial arrangements; arrangements for seeking ethical approval for the work; arrangements for reporting progress and outcomes of the work; confidentiality arrangements; and ownership of intellectual property arising from the research. Some funding bodies make specific requirements for the training and support of the researcher, and in others there may be specific project-based requirements (for example, security clearance, DBS checks etc.).

The Graduate School should consider the agreement before it is signed.

A common feature of such agreements is clarification of the fact that the PGR and the University manage the research, and the sponsor cannot dictate the direction in which the research develops.