

# Research Degree Regulations

For postgraduate researchers undertaking research leading to the awards of Master by Research, Doctor of Philosophy and Professional Doctorate

**01 October 2025 – 30 September 2026**



**Edge Hill  
University**

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# Research Degree Regulations

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## Purpose

These regulations should be read in conjunction with the University's general [Academic Regulations](#). Where the Research Degree Regulations and standard research degree processes operated by the Graduate School remain silent, the general Academic Regulations apply. Where the Research Degree Regulations and the general Academic Regulations are in conflict, the Research Degree Regulations take precedence.

The Research Degree Regulations prescribe and describe both general matters pertaining to Edge Hill research degrees, and other, more specific, matters relating to each particular type of research degree (MRes, PhD, PhD by Publication and Professional Doctorate).

Within the Research Degree Regulations, if particular regulations for a specific award are in conflict with the general regulations relating to research degrees, the particular regulations for an award take precedence.

The Research Degree Regulations do not describe the University's specific processes and procedures relating to research degrees. Those are determined by the Graduate School and are detailed in a series of Graduate School process documents. The major Graduate School process documents are listed in Schedule E.

No regulations can specify how they should be applied in all possible cases, nor can they articulate a formal process for determining the specific nature of a case on a particular occasion (something which is relevant to the application of any regulations). Both of those issues are matters of judgement. No attempt should be made to read *the application* of the Research Degree Regulations in specific *problematic* cases directly off of the text of the regulations. To do that would inevitably result in many errors and considerable inequity. Rather, in such cases, academic judgements must be made by suitably qualified and suitably informed individuals holding appropriate positions within the University. Responsibility for making such judgements generally rests with the Graduate School. The Graduate School Board of Studies and the Research Degrees Sub-committee are the deliberative bodies through which the Graduate School ensures appropriate deliberation as necessary prior to final judgement.

## Regulations

### N1. Operation of Awarding Powers

- N1.1 Research degrees of the University are awarded by the Academic Board under the research degree awarding powers granted to the University in 2008.
- N1.2 Awards are confirmed by the Graduate School Board of Studies, operating under devolved powers from the Academic Board.
- N1.3 The Graduate School is responsible for the development and operation of the processes and procedures of all aspects of research degree enrolments and all other operational aspects in relation to research degrees. The Graduate School owns the policies and procedures relating to the Research Degree Regulations. Research Degrees Sub-committee has delegated responsibility from Academic Board for approval of research degree routes (types of research degree award). This includes the approval of professional doctorates and associated post-nominal designations.
- N1.4 In operating its research degree awarding powers, the University is alert to, and assures consistency with, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), the Office for Students (OfS) Conditions of Registration, and the Research Degree Chapter of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

### N2. Awards Offered

- N2.1 In all Edge Hill research degrees, candidates are required to design, manage, conduct, report and defend the research on the basis of which an award is made.<sup>1</sup>

The University offers the following awards:<sup>2</sup>

*i Master By Research (MRes)<sup>3</sup> (FHEQ level 7)*

The Master by Research (MRes) is awarded to a candidate who, following a programme of research training, demonstrates an understanding of concepts and research methodology appropriate to the field of study, designs appropriate research, critically investigates a focused topic and presents and

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<sup>1</sup> PGRs must normally complete all elements of the work themselves, and so cannot use transcription services, proof-reading services, or research assistants. Occasionally, the requirements of the research may necessitate someone else collecting data where the PGR doing so may have an influence on the data. In such circumstances approval of certain exceptions to the stipulations stated here may be given following consideration at project registration examination.

<sup>2</sup> In addition, a Master of Philosophy (MPhil) (FHEQ 7) may be an exit award for PGRs who are unsuccessful in gaining a PhD, if the appropriate requirements, as specified in the options available to examination panels, have been met. The Master of Philosophy cannot be a target award.

<sup>3</sup> Whilst such degrees will normally confer the post-nominal designation of MRes, a Master by Research gained for work in Law may confer the post-nominal designation of LL.M.

defends a dissertation,<sup>4</sup> by oral examination (or approved alternative) to the satisfaction of the appointed examiners.

The MRes will be awarded on the basis of a candidate having:

- a. Completed an approved programme of research training
- b. Demonstrated an understanding of research methodology appropriate to the field of study
- c. Designed an appropriate research project
- d. Critically investigated a focused topic in completing that research project
- e. Demonstrated an understanding of the concepts relevant to the research project
- f. Presented a dissertation, and defended that dissertation, by oral examination (or approved alternative), to the satisfaction of the appointed examiners

*ii Master of Philosophy (MPhil) (FHEQ level 7)*

The Master of Philosophy (MPhil) is awarded to a candidate who, following a programme of research training, has critically investigated and evaluated an approved topic and demonstrated an advanced understanding of concepts and research methodology appropriate to the field of study, and has presented and defended a thesis by oral examination (or approved alternative), to the satisfaction of the appointed examiners. The research must make an independent contribution to knowledge.

The MPhil will be award on the basis of a candidate having:

- a. Completed an approved programme of research training
- b. Demonstrated an advanced understanding of research methodology appropriate to the field of study
- c. Designed an appropriate research project
- d. Critically investigated and evaluated a focused topic in completing that research project
- e. Demonstrated an advanced understanding of the concepts relevant to the research project
- f. Presented a thesis, and defended that thesis, by oral examination (or approved alternative), to the satisfaction of the appointed examiners
- g. Made an independent contribution to knowledge.

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<sup>4</sup> The MRes dissertation may be a long essay of 15-30,000 words or an alternative, reflecting the nature of the particular discipline, approved at the point of project registration by the Graduate School Board of Studies. Alternatives to the conventional dissertation are a research paper and accompanying research portfolio, or a practice-as-research submission based on a project and exegesis or complementary writing. In approving an alternative to the conventional dissertation, the Graduate School Board of Studies shall satisfy itself that any alternative is equivalent in volume to a 15-30,000-word dissertation.

### *iii Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) (FHEQ level 8)*

The Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) is awarded to a candidate who, following a programme of research training, has critically investigated and evaluated an approved topic, resulting in an independent, significant and original contribution to knowledge, and having demonstrated an advanced understanding of concepts and research methodology appropriate to the field of study, has presented and defended a thesis, by oral examination (or approved alternative), to the satisfaction of the appointed examiners.

The PhD will be awarded on the basis of the candidate having:

- a. Completed an approved programme of research training<sup>5</sup>
- b. Demonstrated an advanced understanding of research methodology appropriate to the field of study
- c. Designed an appropriate research project
- d. Critically investigated and evaluated a focused topic in completing that research project
- e. Demonstrated an advanced understanding of the concepts relevant to the research project
- f. Made a significant and original contribution to knowledge
- g. Made that contribution to knowledge independently
- h. Presented a thesis, and defended that thesis, by oral examination (or approved alternative), to the satisfaction of the appointed examiners.

### *iv Professional Doctorate<sup>6</sup> (FHEQ level 8)*

The Professional Doctorate is awarded to a candidate who, having critically investigated and evaluated an approved topic, produces an independent, significant and original contribution to knowledge directly applicable within a profession. The research must also demonstrate an advanced understanding of concepts and research methodology appropriate to the profession and the research project. The candidate must have undertaken discipline-specific and central research training and presented and defended a thesis based upon their personal research, by oral examination (or approved alternative), to the satisfaction of the appointed examiners.

The Professional Doctorate will be awarded on the basis of a candidate having:

- a. Completed an approved programme of discipline-specific and central research training
- b. Demonstrated an understanding of research methodology appropriate to the profession and the research project
- c. Designed an appropriate research project

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<sup>5</sup> This is not a requirement in relation to the PhD by Publication.

<sup>6</sup> Post-nominal abbreviation to be proposed and agreed at approval of the relevant professional doctorate route.

- d. Critically investigated and evaluated a focused topic in completing that research project
- e. Demonstrated an advanced understanding of the concepts relevant to the profession and the research project
- f. Made a significant and original contribution to knowledge directly applicable within the profession and the research project
- g. Made that contribution to knowledge independently
- h. Presented a thesis, and defended that thesis, by oral examination (or approved alternative), to the satisfaction of the appointed examiners.

N2.2 Awards offered are defined by a series of benchmarks relating to the general level of knowledge and skills required to register for the award and the qualification and study levels required to achieve the award. FHEQ Qualification Level Descriptors can be found as an appendix of the general Academic Regulations

### N3. General Structure of Research Degree Routes

N3.1 The Master by Research, Doctor of Research by the conventional route, and the professional doctorate all share the same basic structure with minor modifications for each route. The general structure of research degrees at Edge Hill and the specific routes for each degree are defined in Schedule C. The PhD by publication is an alternative route to a PhD for current, and former, Edge Hill staff as well as suitably qualified individuals who have not previously been employed by the University.. Specific procedures and regulations relating to the PhD by publication are in Schedule D. Schedule H sets out the additional regulations which are specific to the University's Double Award PhD provision.

### N4. Admission

N4.1 The normal entry requirement for a research degree is a first- or upper second-class honours bachelor degree from a United Kingdom university or other institution recognised for this purpose by the Graduate School Board of Studies, or a qualification which is regarded by the Board as equivalent.

**In relation to the professional doctorate**, the normal entry requirements will standardly apply. However, for candidates who have spent a significant time working in their chosen profession in a graduate level role, the work experience might, to some extent, compensate for slightly lower qualifications by demonstrating experience of the relevant profession. Thus, for such candidates, on merit, a lower second-class honours degree would be an acceptable minimum.

N4.2 The University may also, exceptionally, accept other qualifications and/or professional experience in lieu of the general entry requirement. In such cases, applicants may be required to provide evidence of their suitability for research

degree study through the provision of a prior learning portfolio and a document mapping that evidence to the programme learning outcomes and level descriptors for a suitable bachelor degree programme. While other qualifications and/or experience may be accepted in lieu of the general entry requirement, RPL or other mechanisms leading to entry with advanced standing cannot be used for any part of any of the research degree programmes because of the individual, project-specific, nature of the assessments.

N4.3 Applicants for research degrees must provide at least two academic references from appropriate referees who can attest to the applicant's academic attainment and fitness for research.

N4.4 All applicants must show sufficient command of the English language to complete the relevant programme satisfactorily and to prepare and defend a thesis in English. Applicants whose first language is not English or who originate from countries whose national language is not English are required to demonstrate English language proficiency to minimum standards. For the purposes of these regulations, the minimum standard required is specified as an IELTS score of 7.0 or equivalent, with no element below 6.5.

N4.5 Applicants for the PhD and professional doctorate, and all non-UK applicants (including MRes applicants) must be interviewed before an offer of a place is made. Applicants will normally only be invited for interview if they are suitably qualified, have fully completed the necessary application, and the Graduate School has established that there is appropriate supervisory and examination capacity within the University. Occasionally, an interview will be conducted to explore the nature of the proposed research project further to determine whether the University has suitable supervisory and examination capacity. Interviews will be conducted by a Research Degree Admissions Panel, appointed through the Graduate School. The chair will be appointed by the Graduate School and the remainder of the panel will include a minimum of two research active members of staff with relevant subject knowledge who will have received appropriate training, at least one of whom will be an experienced supervisor. **In the case of the MRes**, other than for non-UK applicants, there will not standardly be a formal interview following application. MRes applications will be considered by a panel of two research active members of staff with relevant subject expertise and the MRes Leader, or a Graduate School-approved nominee.

N4.6 Offers are made by the Graduate School and are subject to the approval of the Dean. The Graduate School will seek assurance that, as far as can be determined at this initial stage, adequate and appropriate supervisory arrangements can be made and that the research environment, governance arrangements, available resources and facilities are suitable to the proposal. An offer of a place specifies the mode of study offered (part-time or full-time).

- N4.7 Following admission, a postgraduate researcher (PGR) will be formally allocated at least one experienced supervisor who will work with the PGR to develop an application to register a research degree project. The Graduate School may change the supervisory arrangements for any PGR as necessary at any point during the period of registration. All changes to supervisory teams will be formally confirmed by the Graduate School.
- N4.8 Admission, and continuing registration, is subject to completion of a specified programme of research training and an approved programme of related studies.
- N4.9 Applicants may not appeal an admissions decision. Applicants who are dissatisfied with any aspect of the admissions process may use the University Complaints Procedure.

## N5. Enrolment

- N5.1 PGRs are required to enrol with, and pay fees to, the University once they have accepted the offer of a place.<sup>7</sup> PGRs are required to enrol and pay fees for each academic session, or part of a session, during which they remain enrolled up to a maximum of three years full-time or five years part-time (or the *pro rata* equivalent for mixed part-time and full-time registration) **in the case of the PhD and professional doctorate**. There is a single, fixed, fee regardless of mode of registration **in the case of the MRes**, but it is payable over twelve months in the case of full-time registration and over eighteen months in the case of part-time registration. Failure to pay fees will normally result in termination of registration.
- N5.2 Enrolment is normally in either October or February. Any exceptions to that must be approved by the Dean of the Graduate School. In all such exceptional cases a suitable plan must be provided by the relevant Graduate School Research Degree Contact for the subject area to ensure that all research training and induction will be covered, and appropriate paperwork completed in order to demonstrate that the requirement for such training and induction has been met.
- N5.3 The Graduate School may accept applications for PhD from candidates who are already registered for a PhD in another UK research degree awarding institution, for example where their principal 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 determine the point of registration, and the time remaining until progression confirmation or submission.

Each such case will be unique, and the documentary requirements will be established by the Graduate School. In all cases, however, an admissions interview must be conducted, and the Edge Hill English language requirements must be met.

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<sup>7</sup> Failure to pay fees can result in termination of registration. Termination of registration is permanent and so prevents re-registration when the outstanding debt is cleared.

## N6. Periods of Registration<sup>8</sup>

N6.1 The minimum and maximum periods of registration are as follows:

| Award                                          | Minimum   | Expected  | Maximum <sup>9</sup> |
|------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|----------------------|
| <i>PhD</i>                                     |           |           |                      |
| Full-time                                      | 24 months | 36 months | 48 months            |
| Part-time                                      | 36 months | 54 months | 72 months            |
| <i>Professional Doctorate (part-time only)</i> |           |           |                      |
| Part-time                                      | 36 months | 54 months | 72 months            |
| <i>MRes</i>                                    |           |           |                      |
| Full-time                                      | 9 months  | 12 months | 12 months            |
| Part-time                                      | 12 months | 18 months | 18 months            |

Failure to submit by the end of the maximum period of registration will mean that no submission will be accepted as registration will have ended. The Graduate School can approve extensions to registration if it regards the circumstances to be appropriate.

N6.2 In those cases where a PGR combines periods of full-time and part-time enrolment during the registration, the maximum registration period will be calculated on a pro-rata basis.

## N7. Approval of Project Registration

N7.1 All PGRs must submit an application for project registration containing a research proposal, and, as appendices to that proposal:<sup>10</sup>

- a submission coversheet, including abstract;
- a learning and skills needs analysis including a plan of a proposed programme of related studies for the remainder of the first year of study and an indication of how that programme of related studies will address the identified needs;
- a record of research training attended;
- a research data management plan;
- a project management plan.

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<sup>8</sup> Research degree registration is 365 days per year. All timeframes specified in these regulations are in accordance with such registration, and so *do not* only include working days other than where explicitly specified.

<sup>9</sup> The Graduate School may approve a period of interruption of study. **In the case of the MRes**, the normal maximum period of interruption of studies is three months. **In relation to the PhD and professional doctorate**, the normal maximum period of interruption of studies is twelve months. In all cases, the Graduate School may, exceptionally, approve an additional interruption of studies, beyond the normal maximum periods specified here, if it judges it appropriate to do so.

<sup>10</sup> Use of video conferencing is permitted for oral examinations at any stage of the research degree process and is standard for progression examinations. The University will not normally *require* a final viva to be conducted by video conferencing, but such a format may be requested by the candidate or any of the examiners. The Graduate School will only approve such a request if the candidate and all examiners agree to the arrangements. Use of telephone conferencing is not normally permitted for oral examinations. Oral examinations (or approved alternatives) need not be held on Edge Hill University premises. All proposals to hold an examination somewhere other than Edge Hill University premises must be approved by the Chair of the Graduate School Board of Studies. Normally, oral examinations (or approved alternatives) will be held on mainland Britain. Exceptions must be approved by the Chair of the Graduate School Board of Studies.

**N7.2 In relation to the PhD and professional doctorate**, the maximum length of the period prior to submission of a project registration application<sup>11</sup> is approximately four months for full-time registration, and approximately seven months for part-time registration. A specific submission deadline will be set at the beginning of each academic year.

**In relation to the MRes**, the maximum length of the period prior to submission of a project registration application is approximately 10-12 weeks for full-time registration, and approximately six months for part-time registration. A specific submission deadline will be set at the beginning of each academic year.

For all research degrees, failure to submit a registration application by the relevant deadline will lead to the submission being treated as a second, and final, submission. Second, and final, submissions that are due as a result of a failure to submit by the original deadline, must be made within ten working days of the original deadline.

For all research degrees, failure to attend the viva examination without appropriate mitigation will count as a failure of that examination, with the subsequent viva examination being counted as a resubmission (final submission), thereby forfeiting the right to two attempts at the viva examination.

**N7.3** Should a PGR fail to meet the agreed start date, no adjustment will be made to the deadline for project registration application submission.

**N7.4** Applications to register a research degree project are subject to approval by the Graduate School. Initial assessment of the proposal and accompanying documentation is through formal presentation by the PGR to a Project Registration Examination Panel, appointed through the Graduate School. **In the case of the PhD and the professional doctorate** (both of which have a project registration viva as part of the assessment) that panel is composed of two research active members of staff, one of whom will normally be a member of the PGR's proposed supervisory team. The examiner that is not a member of the supervisory team may act as chair, provided the individual is suitably experienced and has completed the necessary training. In cases where that examiner cannot act as chair, an independent chair will be appointed by the Graduate School.<sup>12</sup> In such circumstances, the independent chair will not be drawn from the department, or, in the case of the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Health, Social Care and Medicine, the faculty, in which the candidate

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<sup>11</sup> The time prior to submission of the project registration application. It will take some further time to make arrangements for the project registration viva, and then for subsequent approval of project registration by the Graduate School.

<sup>12</sup> The Graduate School maintains a list of approved chairs, from which an appropriate chair is selected.

is based. That measure ensures that there is a regular independent check to establish that appropriate standards are being applied in each subject area.

Candidates, examiners or supervisors may request the Graduate School to consider appointing an independent chair. Where it deems it necessary, the Graduate School may require an independent chair for any project registration examination.

Amendment to these arrangements requires the approval of the Dean of the Graduate School and will only be given where exceptional mitigating circumstances apply.

**In the case of the MRes**, there is no project registration viva. The application for project registration will be assessed by the Director of Studies and one other member of academic staff with appropriate subject expertise, and who is not involved in supervision of the project. The two examiners will agree a joint recommendation to the Graduate School. Where agreement cannot be reached either the MRes Lead or an additional member of staff with subject expertise will be appointed by the Graduate School as a third examiner.

N7.5 An individual project should be the norm; group projects in which all PGRs work to the same research design are not permitted.

In exceptional circumstances projects in which a group of PGRs conduct research in the same area are acceptable as long as discrete individual programmes of research can be identified in which each PGR is able to demonstrate that s/he has designed her/his research.

N7.6 On completion of the assessment, the panel will submit a report to the Graduate School with one of the following recommendations:

- 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 candidate should revise and resubmit the proposal for re-examination (with a viva for doctoral degrees); <sup>13</sup>
- iii Following a re-examination, the submission is not of an appropriate standard, so the project should not be registered (the candidate's enrolment will therefore be terminated by the Board); or
- iv The candidate should be considered under the University's malpractice regulations.

N7.7 In cases under N7.6 (ii) above, **PhD and Professional Doctorate candidates** will be allowed to resubmit a proposal for consideration within eight weeks (full-time) and twelve weeks (part-time) from the date of receipt of the

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<sup>13</sup> 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.

specification of amendments. **MRes candidates** will be allowed to resubmit a proposal within four weeks (full-time) and six weeks (part-time) from the date of receipt of the specification of amendments.<sup>14</sup>

Further applications will not be considered, and registration will be terminated if the resubmitted application is unsuccessful.

**In the case of the PhD and the Professional Doctorate**, there will normally be two project registration vivas before any decision is made to terminate a PGR's registration. That will not, however, be the case were the candidate fails to meet the initial submission deadline. In cases such as those, there will only be one project registration viva. In all doctoral cases, at least one viva must be conducted before any decision is made to terminate the candidate's registration.

N7.8 The Graduate School Board of Studies will consider applications to register a project, along with reports and recommendations from panels. In approving an application to register a project, the Board shall satisfy itself that:

- i the candidate is suitably qualified;
- ii the programme of research submitted by the candidate is viable and appropriate to the standard of the award sought;
- iii the supervisory arrangements are adequate and sustainable in terms of the requirements of the relevant research degree route;
- iv appropriate resources and facilities are available for the conduct of the programme of research;
- v ethical approval has been obtained where appropriate or a date has been identified by which the proposal will be referred to the relevant research ethics committee for further consideration. It is normally expected that ethical approval will be obtained by no later than three months after project registration. No primary research may be undertaken until a proposal has gained the appropriate ethical approval in accordance with the University's research ethics procedures;
- 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

N7.9 Where the Graduate School Board of Studies is not satisfied in relation to points N7.8 (iii-vi), the application may be rejected, referred back for further work, or remitted for chair's action subsequent to the receipt of further information as required by the Graduate School Board of Studies.

N7.10 The Graduate School Board of Studies may approve the registration of projects where the candidate's own creative work forms, as a point of origin or

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<sup>14</sup> Where the regulations specify weeks, or months, that shall mean seven days per week (i.e., not a working week), and 30 days per month.

reference, a significant part of the intellectual inquiry, subject to the work having been undertaken, or being put to substantial new use, as part of the registered programme of research.

N7.11 In the case of registrations under N7.10, the application for project registration will set out the form of the intended submission and the proposed methods of assessment for approval by the Graduate School Board of Studies.

N7.12 The Graduate School Board of Studies may require further examination as necessary to satisfy itself that the assessment criteria have been met and/or the examination operated appropriately.

## N8. Research Ethics

N8.1 Research proposals should receive ethical approval from the appropriate research ethics committee.

N8.2 No primary research may begin until a proposal has gained the appropriate ethical approval.

## N9. Supervision

N9.1 The supervisory team is approved by the Graduate School as part of the approval of project registration. The Graduate School may change the supervisory arrangements for any PGR as necessary at any point during the period of registration. All changes to supervisory teams will be formally confirmed by the Graduate School Board of Studies.

The specifications relating to supervision outlined below are minimum requirements. All decisions regarding the suitability of supervisory teams and the involvement of individual supervisors rest with the Graduate School

N9.2 **For the PhD and the professional doctorate**, the supervisory team will consist of at least two, and normally not more than three, supervisors, at least one of whom will have previous experience of supervision to successful completion at the level of the award for which the PGR is registered.

**For the MRes**, PGRs will normally have one supervisor, but in some cases a second supervisor may be approved. All MRes supervisors must have experience of supervision at level 7, although not necessarily research degree supervisory experience.

N9.3 The supervisory team will collectively demonstrate active engagement in research, bringing a range of skills and knowledge relevant to the project.

N9.4 Other than supervisors drawn from the relevant profession for the professional doctorate, or cases where the Graduate School deems it appropriate to add an

additional supervisor drawn from a relevant profession to an MRes or PhD supervisory team,<sup>15</sup> research degree supervisors must be active researchers currently involved in the production of peer-reviewed publications, and with a recent record of such publications.

N9.5 One member of the team, who will be a permanent member of staff of the University, will be designated as Director of Studies. While this is purely an administrative role, the Director of Studies normally also has full supervisory duties. Specific responsibilities within a supervisory team will be determined on a case-by-case basis

N9.6 Other members of the team will have specific subject and/or methodological expertise and may, in exceptional circumstances where the Graduate School is satisfied that there is good cause, be drawn from outwith the University. **In relation to the PhD and the professional doctorate**, each supervisory team must include two members of Edge Hill staff.<sup>16</sup>

**In relation to the professional doctorate**, one member of the supervisory team should be appointed from within the profession (not necessarily an academic). If no member of the supervisory team has such professional experience, then a specialist advisor must be appointed to bring specific professional expertise to the team. There should be regular contact between the PGR, the supervisory team and the advisor throughout the entire research programme.

**In relation to the MRes**, there must be at least one member of Edge Hill staff involved in the supervision of each PGR.

N9.7 In addition to the supervisors, an advisor, or advisors, may be proposed to contribute some specialised knowledge or a link with an external organisation or collaborating institution.

N9.8 A PGR at Edge Hill is generally ineligible to act as a member of a supervisory team for another PGR but may be appointed as an advisor. Exceptions may be considered where the proposed supervising PGR already holds a research degree at the level of the award sought or has experience of supervision to successful completion at the level of the award sought.

N9.9 Supervisors and advisors must declare any close personal or business relationship with a PGR or colleague. The Graduate School will determine the

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<sup>15</sup> Often individuals with such expertise will be designated advisors rather than supervisors in the case of the MRes or PhD, but in exceptional circumstances where the specifics of the project warrant it the Graduate School may appoint someone from a profession as a supervisor, but in such cases the individual will be appointed in addition to those supervisors necessary to meet the core requirements of these Research Degree Regulations.

<sup>16</sup> 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 these 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

appropriate action in such cases. This will normally result in the appointment of an alternative supervisor or advisor. Individuals cannot *supervise, or act as an advisor for*, relatives, partners or those with whom they have a close personal or professional relationship. They cannot *supervise with* (or act as an advisor as part of a team with) relatives, partners or those with whom they have a close personal relationship and cannot *act as an examiner* for a candidate who is supervised or advised by anyone who falls into those categories (relative, partner, close personal relationship). In regarding such relationships to present a conflict of interest in research degree examination at all levels, the University treats conflict of interest as an objective matter relating to a relationship and roles, not something that should be thought of as bringing into question the integrity or professionalism of individuals.

N9.10 The *maximum* number of PGRs that can be supervised concurrently by an individual member of staff of the University is normally nine (pro rata for staff on fractional contracts, rounded up or down to the nearest whole number), with no more than six of those at doctoral level (PhD and professional doctorate). Only very experienced supervisors will be permitted to supervise the maximum number of PGRs specified here. Decisions regarding supervisory load are made by the Graduate School, which maintains a guidance document that explains the relevant considerations and the normal relationship between existing supervisory load, supervisory experience and supervisory capacity. Deans of Faculty and Heads of Department are responsible for ensuring that the workload allocation model takes account of the requirements for research degree supervision, examination and training, as they would in relation to any other responsibilities in which staff work in the service of the wider University.

N9.11 Any change to the supervisory arrangements must be approved by the Graduate School and confirmed by the Graduate School Board of Studies. 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 Graduate School research degree contact such that the PGR is not disadvantaged in project progression. Ill-health, retirement or other long-term unavailability of a member of the supervisory team may, occasionally, leave a PGR without a full supervisory team as specified in the minimum requirements for a team. Such circumstances are unavoidable and will not constitute a breach of these regulations. In such cases, the Graduate School will make all reasonable efforts to find a replacement. Where the University is unable to provide appropriate supervision the Graduate School Board of Studies may terminate registration.

N9.12 PGRs who experience difficulties with any aspect of supervision should first seek to resolve these informally through discussion with the Director of Studies. Unresolved difficulties should be raised with the relevant Graduate School Research Degree contact for the subject area and then, if necessary, with the

Graduate School for action. Exceptionally, this may lead to a change in supervisory arrangements.

## N10. Progression of Registration

**N10.1 Candidates registered on a PhD or professional doctorate route** must submit an application for progression of their registration to the Graduate School. Normally, such applications should be submitted no later than eighteen months from first registration for full-time PGRs or thirty-six months for part-time.

Failure to submit by the relevant deadline will result in the submission, when it is made, being treated as a resubmission (a final submission), thereby forfeiting the right to two submissions. Submissions that are due as a result of a failure to submit by the original deadline, must be made within ten working days of the original deadline.

Failure to attend the viva examination without appropriate mitigation will count as a failure of that examination, with the subsequent viva examination being counted as a resubmission (final submission), thereby forfeiting the right to two attempts at the viva examination.

**N10.2** Applications for assessment for progression of registration must be supported by the supervisory team. This does not mean that the supervisory team must feel that the work is of an appropriate standard to be successful, but rather that the supervisory team feel that the PGR's progress to date is adequate for an examination to be appropriate. The purpose of this regulation is to avoid examinations involving external examiners in which the work is clearly not of a suitable standard such that no useful purpose would be served by holding an examination. It is certainly not designed to ensure that all PGRs examined will be permitted to progress. Most work that is below the required standard will be suitable for examination, but occasionally work is so poor that no useful purpose will be served by holding an examination.

Where the supervisory team cannot support an application for assessment for progression, the Graduate School will invite the candidate and the supervisors to a meeting to discuss progress to ensure that all parties understand the regulatory requirements and to establish that the recommendation of the supervisory team is correct. If the recommendation that an application for assessment should not be accepted because no useful purpose would be served by conducting an examination, the candidate's progress will then be placed under formal review for eight weeks full-time or twelve weeks part-time. That process will culminate in a decision being made by the Graduate School as to what should happen next. The Graduate School may consider termination of registration if appropriate progress is not made by the end of the period of progress review. Appropriate progress is that which brings the work to the point where examination would be profitable, although not necessarily lead to approval of progression. In such cases, termination of registration will be considered in accordance with Schedule F of the Research Degree Regulations. Alternatively, the Graduate School may conclude that it is appropriate at the end of the period of progress review to

proceed with submission of an application for assessment and an examination. In such circumstances, the examination will constitute a second and final examination. No further examination will be permitted

N10.3 Applications for progression must be accompanied by a report of no more than 6000 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;
- iii the written work to date, 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

In addition, applications for progression should contain at least one draft chapter from the thesis. Where work has already been published, the candidate may include the appropriate publication(s).

N10.4 Applications for progression are initially assessed by an examination panel appointed through the Graduate School.<sup>17</sup> The panel should assess the candidate and the work in relation to the following criteria:

- i the candidate shows evidence of having made appropriate progress in their research to date;
- ii the proposed original contribution to knowledge is of sufficient significance to suggest that, if the research is completed as proposed, the candidate will produce a thesis appropriate for submission;
- iii the candidate displays (in their written work and in response to questioning and discussion) the knowledge and skills necessary to produce a successful doctoral submission.

If the panel is satisfied that all these requirements have been met, there is no reason not to recommend progression

N10.5 The examination panel will include two research active examiners, no more than one of which will be a member of the supervisory team, but the panel need not include any members of the supervisory team. The examiner that is a member of the supervisory team can be the same person that conducted the candidate's project registration viva.

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<sup>17</sup> Use of video conferencing is permitted for oral examinations at any stage of the research degree process and is standard for progression examinations. The University will not normally *require* a final viva to be conducted by video conferencing, but such a format may be requested by the candidate or any of the examiners. The Graduate School will only approve such a request if the candidate and all examiners agree to the arrangements. Use of telephone conferencing is not normally permitted for oral examinations. Oral examinations (or approved alternatives) need not be held on Edge Hill University premises. All proposals to hold an examination somewhere other than Edge Hill University premises must be approved by the Chair of the Graduate School Board of Studies. Normally, oral examinations (or approved alternatives) will be held on mainland Britain. Exceptions must be approved by the Chair of the Graduate School Board of Studies.

One examiner will be external to the University and at least one examiner will have experience of supervising at least one PhD to successful completion. An external examiner may not have acted previously as the candidate's examiner (on the same research degree), supervisor or advisor, nor have been, within the previous three years, either a supervisor of another PGR, or an external examiner on a taught course in the same department.

The internal examiner may act as chair, provided the individual is suitably experienced and has completed the necessary training. In cases where the internal examiner cannot act as chair, an independent chair will be appointed. In such circumstances, the independent chair will not be drawn from the department, or, in the case of the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Health, Social Care and Medicine, the faculty, in which the candidate is based. That measure ensures that there is a regular independent check to establish that appropriate standards are being applied in each subject area.

Candidates, examiners or supervisors may request the Graduate School to consider appointing an independent chair. Where it deems it necessary, the Graduate School may require an independent chair for any progression examination.

Amendment to these arrangements requires the approval of the Dean of the Graduate School and will only be given where exceptional mitigating circumstances apply.

N10.6 Prior to the oral examination (or approved alternative), each examiner will be sent a copy of the submission. There is no preliminary report in the case of progression examination (unlike final examination), but each examiner must notify the Graduate School immediately if they judge the submission to be of insufficient standard to warrant examination by oral examination (or approved alternative).

N10.7 Examiners may not consult with each other prior to the oral examination (or approved alternative), even in cases where they feel that the work is not of an appropriate standard to warrant examination by oral examination (or approved alternative).

N10.8 Where all the examiners are of the opinion that no useful purpose would be served by conducting an oral examination (or approved alternative), they will provide the Graduate School with written guidance on the deficiencies of the submission for the candidate who will then have a period of no more than eight weeks full-time or twelve weeks part-time to revise the submission for re-examination. This revised submission will constitute a second submission. No further re-examination will be permitted.

N10.9 Where the preliminary recommendations from the examiners are not in agreement in relation to the value of holding an oral examination (or approved alternative), 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).

N10.10 The examiners may not recommend that a candidate fail outright without holding an oral examination (or approved alternative).

N10.11 On completion of the assessment, the panel will prepare a report making one of the following recommendations to the Graduate School Board of Studies:

- 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;<sup>18</sup>
- 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;<sup>19</sup>
- iv Following a re-examination, the submission is not of an appropriate standard, so the candidate should not transfer or 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.

N10.12 In cases of referral, the candidate will be allowed a period of no more than eight weeks for full-time registration or twelve weeks for part-time registration to make a resubmission.

Written feedback will be provided to the Graduate School by the examination panel for transmission to the candidate.

If there is disagreement between the examiners, the Graduate School Board of Studies will receive individual reports from each examiner and make a decision as to the outcome. Normally, the Board will prioritise the recommendation of the external examiner where it does not find that recommendation, or its justification, in conflict with the Research Degree Regulations. Where it does have such reservations, N17.4 will apply.

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<sup>18</sup> Where the candidate'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.

<sup>19</sup> Where the candidate'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.

N10.13 Only one resubmission of an application for progression is permitted. Where an application is rejected for the second time, the candidate's registration will be terminated.

N10.14 Candidates who are refused confirmation of continuing registration at the second submission may appeal under the University's Appeals Procedure.

N10.15 The Graduate School Board of Studies may require further examination as necessary to satisfy itself that the assessment criteria have been met and/or the examination operated appropriately.

## N11. Changes to Registration

N11.1 Changes to registrations are by application and are subject to the approval of the Graduate School, such changes include:

- i Change in mode of study;
- ii Interruption of study (intercalation);
- iii Extension to the period of registration;
- iv Change in award level;
- v Early submission;
- vi Requests for alternative assessment

N11.2 All changes to registration must be supported by the supervisory team.

Applications for a change to mode of study require justification. Requests may be declined on the grounds that the University does not have the capacity to accommodate the request.

N11.3 **A PGR registered for PhD or professional doctorate** who is unable to complete, or seeks to exit before submission, may apply to be permitted to submit for examination for the award of MRes. The Graduate School will satisfy itself that the standard of award applied for is appropriate and could, conceivably, be met. In such cases, the maximum period of registration will move to that which applied to the MRes, and, where the period of registration appropriate to an MRes has not already been completed, registration will be changed to MRes. If that period of registration has already been completed, submission will be required within 30 days. Neither submission, nor examination will be delayed by the process of changing registration from PhD to MRes. Examination will take place under the regulations pertaining to the MRes.

N11.4 An interruption of studies may be approved where a PGR is prevented from making progress with the research because of illness or other reasonable cause.<sup>20</sup> The maximum interruption period per application is 365 days for PGRs

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<sup>20</sup> Interruption of study is not appropriate in all cases in which a PGR is prevented from making progress. In some cases, the Graduate School will make use of the *Research Degree Fitness to Study Procedures (Schedule G)*.

registered **for the PhD or professional doctorate**, and 90 days for a PGR registered **for the MRes**. The minimum interruption period per application is 90 days **for PGRs registered for the PhD or professional doctorate** and 60 days **for those registered for the MRes**. Normally, a PGR shall only be permitted periods of suspension totalling 365 days in cases of **registration for the PhD or professional doctorate** and 90 days in cases of **registration for the MRes**. Exceptions are subject to approval by the Graduate School. Normally, where a PGR requests a period of interrupted study prior to completion of the core postgraduate researcher development programme and successful registration of the project, they will be required to restart studies at the next appropriate formal entry point. Exceptions are subject to approval by the Graduate School.

Mode of registration (part-time or full-time) has no bearing on the minimum, or maximum, timeframes for interruption of studies.

N11.5 An agreed period of interruption will not be included in calculating the period of registration.

N11.6 Applications for *extension* must be supported by evidence of the exceptional circumstances which have prevented completion within the normal timescale. Normally, any period of extension will not exceed 90 days in the case of PhD or professional doctorate registration and 60 days in the case of MRes registration.

Mode of registration (part-time or full-time) has no bearing on the minimum, or maximum, timeframes for extensions.

N11.7 Withdrawal from registration must be notified to the Graduate School by the PGR for approval and report to the Graduate School Board of Studies.

## **N12. Monitoring of PGR Progress**

N12.1 Where a PGR is not making satisfactory academic progress, is not responding appropriately to feedback and/or is no longer in contact with his/her supervisory team, the Graduate School may employ *Schedule F* of these regulations at any point, which may lead to termination of registration.

N12.2 A PGR whose registration is terminated because of lack of academic progress, a failure to respond appropriately to feedback, or a failure to maintain contact with the supervisory team may appeal under the Research Degree Appeals Procedures.

## **N13. Submission of Thesis or Dissertation**

N13.1 A thesis or, in the case of the MRes, a dissertation, will be submitted in English, unless otherwise approved by the Graduate School Board of Studies.

Failure to submit by the relevant deadline will result in the submission, when it is made, being treated as a resubmission (a final submission), thereby forfeiting the right to two submissions. Submissions that are due as a result of a failure to

submit by the original deadline, must be made within ten working days of the original deadline.

N13.2 Submission must be completed within the period of registration and must comply in length, style, layout and presentation with *Schedule A* of these regulations. The thesis or dissertation submitted for final examination must be in print and electronic format.

N13.3 Where the candidate's own creative work has formed a significant part of the intellectual inquiry under N7.10, the final submission must be accompanied by a permanent record of the creative element of the work, where practicable, bound in with the thesis.

N13.4 The thesis is generally regarded as a public document. Exceptionally, the Graduate School may approve an application for a thesis to remain confidential to enable a patent application to be lodged or to protect commercially or politically sensitive material.

N13.5 Applications for confidentiality are normally made and approved at the time of registration. Where the need for confidentiality only becomes apparent as the research progresses, a later application may be made but must precede submission of the thesis for examination.

N13.6 The period of confidentiality will not normally exceed three years from *final* submission of the thesis. Approval of requests for exceptions is at the discretion of the Graduate School.

N13.7 The copies of the thesis submitted for examination and the final submission will remain the property of the University but intellectual property rights (IPR) and copyright normally reside with the PGR (exceptions are outlined in the *Policy on Intellectual Property*). Where a PGR is being sponsored in relation to the research, agreement on the allocation of IPR will be reached at the point of project registration. Where appropriate, the University will assist the PGR, on an agreed basis, in the exploitation of IPR. It is the PGR's responsibility to ensure that any third-party copyright is respected and that all necessary permissions are obtained.

#### **N14. Final Examination Arrangements and the Appointment of Examiners**

N14.1 Final examination arrangements, including proposals for the appointment of examiners, are approved by the Graduate School.

N14.2 The Director of Studies is responsible for submitting proposals for the examination team to the Graduate School within the timeframe specified in the relevant Graduate School documentation.

N14.3 A research degree candidate will be examined by at least two examiners, normally including one internal and one external examiner (external to the

University). In addition, **in the case of the PhD and professional doctorate**, a suitably experienced independent member of staff, who has completed the requisite training, will be appointed to chair the viva and to keep notes in relation to the process. **In the case of the MRes**, the internal examiner may act as chair, provided the individual is suitably experienced and has completed the necessary training. In cases where the internal examiner cannot act as chair, an independent chair will be appointed. In such circumstances, the independent chair will not be drawn from the department, or, in the case of the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Health, Social Care and Medicine, the faculty, in which the candidate is based. That measure ensures that there is a regular independent check to establish that appropriate standards are being applied in each subject area.

Candidates, examiners or supervisors may request the Graduate School to consider appointing an independent chair. Where it deems it necessary, the Graduate School may require an independent chair for any **final MRes examination**.

Amendment to these arrangements requires the approval of the Dean of the Graduate School and will only be given where exceptional mitigating circumstances apply

N14.4 An additional external examiner is required for PGRs who are also members of staff <sup>21</sup>of:

- i the University
- ii a designated partner institution of the University
- iii a collaborating institution as designated on the approved registration documentation.

N14.5 Examiners will be experienced in research in the general area of the candidate's thesis and, where practicable, will have recent specialist experience in the particular topic that is the subject of examination.

**In relation to the professional doctorate**, at least one member of the examining team must have appropriate experience of working in the profession. Whilst it is preferable to identify 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 (external) examiner. Thus, a team might comprise an internal academic, an external academic (for benchmarking of standards), and finally an external practitioner. At least one of the examiners must be familiar with professional doctorates

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<sup>21</sup> The following are not considered to be subject to this regulation: staff on fractional contracts less than 0.3 FTE, associate tutors teaching fewer than eight hours per week, Graduate Teaching Assistants and staff who have been appointed to a full-time or permanent contract within one year of examination.

N14.6 The examining team must collectively hold a minimum of two previous examinations of PGRs at the level of the award being examined. **In the case of the MRes**, any examination experience suitable to meet this requirement must be from a level 7 research degree, not a taught degree, although doctoral examination experience also meets the requirement. **In the case of the professional doctorate**, any doctoral level examination experience will contribute to meeting this requirement, but, as noted in N14.5, at least one of the examiners must be familiar with the relevant profession.

N14.7 An external examiner may not have acted previously as the candidate's examiner (on the same research degree), supervisor or advisor, nor have been, within the previous three years, either a supervisor of another PGR, or an external examiner on a taught course, in the department in which the candidate is based.

N14.8 Examiners must declare any close personal or business relationship with a PGR, supervisor, or fellow examiner that could reasonably be thought to bring into question the impartiality of the examination process. The Chair of the Graduate School Board of Studies will determine the appropriate action in such cases; this would normally result in the appointment of an alternative examiner.

N14.9 The Graduate School will ensure that an external examiner is not appointed with such frequency that familiarity with the University might be considered prejudicial to objective judgement. Judgements as to whether the appointment of an external examiner is likely to lead to a conflict of interest will be made by the Graduate School.

N14.10 The internal examiner will be a research active member of the University's permanent or emeritus professorial staff who will not be the candidate's supervisor, advisor, or former supervisor or advisor at the corresponding level of study. The internal examiner for a final examination may not have acted previously as the PGR's examiner on the same research degree.

N14.11 Where there is a requirement for the thesis to remain confidential, examiners must be prepared to agree to maintain such confidentiality.

N14.12 Examiners are required to maintain confidentiality within the examining process and with respect to the thesis until publication. Where necessary, the Graduate School may require a non-disclosure agreement.

## **N15. The Examination**

N15.1 The examinations for the degrees of MRes, professional doctorate and PhD have two stages

- i the submission and preliminary assessment of the thesis or dissertation;

- ii the defence of the thesis or dissertation by oral examination (or approved alternative).

N15.2 It is a candidate's responsibility to:

- i solely determine when a thesis is ready for submission whether or not it has the approval of the candidate's supervisors; <sup>22</sup>
- ii ensure the thesis is submitted within the registration period and complies with the required format;
- iii confirm that the content of the thesis or dissertation has not been submitted for a comparable academic award (although reference to work already submitted may be made in a thesis/dissertation covering a wider field).

N15.3 Where a doctoral candidate wishes to submit a thesis earlier than thirty-six months (full-time registration) or 54 months (part-time registration) from the date of enrolment, confirmation is required by all members of the supervisory team that the thesis is of an appropriate standard to merit examination.

N15.4 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.

N15.5 Use of video conferencing is permitted for oral examinations at any stage of the research degree process and is standard for progression examinations. The University will not normally *require* a final viva to be conducted by video conferencing, but such a format may be requested by the candidate or any of the examiners. The Graduate School will only approve such a request if the candidate and all examiners agree to the arrangements. Use of telephone conferencing is not normally permitted for oral examinations. Oral examinations (or approved alternatives) need not be held on Edge Hill University premises. All proposals to hold an examination somewhere other than Edge Hill University premises must be approved by the Chair of the Graduate School Board of Studies. Normally, oral examinations (or approved alternatives) will be held on mainland Britain. Exceptions must be approved by the Chair of the Graduate School Board of Studies.

N15.6 All examinations will be conducted in English.

N15.7 The oral examination will focus on the programme of work and on the field of study in which the programme lies. Where, for reasons of sickness, disability or comparable valid cause, the Graduate School Board of Studies is satisfied that a candidate would be at serious disadvantage if required to undergo an oral examination, an alternative form of examination may be approved. Such

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<sup>22</sup> Candidates are strongly advised not to submit without the support of their supervisory team but retain the right to do so.

approval will not be given on the grounds that the candidate's knowledge of English is inadequate.

N15.8 Failure to attend the viva examination without appropriate mitigation will count as a failure of that examination, with the subsequent viva examination being counted as a resubmission (final attempt), thereby forfeiting the right to two attempts at the viva examination.

N15.9 Candidates may not take any part in the formal arrangements for the examination, nor have any contact with the external examiner(s) between their appointment and the oral examination (or approved alternative).

N15.10 One supervisor may attend the oral examination as an observer with the prior written consent of the candidate, the chair and the examiners, but must withdraw prior to the deliberations of the examiners on the outcome of the examination.

N15.11 The Graduate School Board of Studies, through the chair of the examination viva, will ensure that the conduct of examinations and the presentation of the examiners' recommendations are undertaken in accordance with the University's regulations. Where the Graduate School Board of Studies is made aware of a failure to comply with the specified procedures, the examination may be declared invalid and new examiners appointed.

## **N16. Preliminary Assessment of the Thesis or Dissertation**

N16.1 Prior to the oral examination (or approved alternative), each examiner will be sent a copy of the thesis and is required to submit an independent preliminary report in a prescribed format to the Graduate School indicating a provisional recommendation

N16.2 Examiners may not consult with each other in preparing their report.

N16.3 Recommendations will be based on the examiner's judgement of the thesis in relation to the requirements for the award as outlined in N2.1.

N16.4 If an examiner is of the opinion that no useful purpose would be served by conducting an oral examination (or approved alternative), this will form the basis of the recommendation.

N16.5 Where all the examiners are of the opinion that no useful purpose would be served by conducting an oral examination (or approved alternative), they will provide the Graduate School with written guidance on the deficiencies of the thesis for the candidate who will then have a period of no more than twelve months **in the case of the PhD and professional doctorate**, and three months (ninety days) **in the case of the MRes**, to revise the thesis or dissertation for re-examination. Submission of the revised thesis or dissertation will constitute a second submission. No further re-examination will be permitted.

N16.6 Where the preliminary recommendations from the examiners are not in agreement, 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).

N16.7 The examiners may not recommend that a PGR fail outright without holding an oral examination (or approved alternative).

## N17. First Oral Exam

N17.1 Examinations are conducted as set out in section N15.

N17.2 Following the oral examination (or approved alternative) the examiners will, where they are in agreement, prepare a joint report and recommendation to the Graduate School Board of Studies and, where the recommendation is to make the award, certify that the thesis meets the criteria for the award outlined in N2.1.

N17.3 The following recommendations are available to the examiners:

- i that the candidate be awarded the degree;
- ii that the candidate be required to make minor amendments to the thesis or dissertation, with the amended thesis or dissertation being submitted no later than three months from the date of receipt of guidance from the examining team in **the case of the PhD and the professional doctorate**, and six weeks (forty-two days) from receipt of guidance from the examining team **in the case of the MRes**. The examiners will provide written guidance to the candidate, via the Graduate School, on what amendments and corrections are required.<sup>23</sup> The internal examiner will confirm that the amendments have been addressed. Confirmation of the amendments having been addressed shall constitute a recommendation to the Graduate School Board of Studies that the candidate be awarded the degree;
- iii that the candidate be required to make major amendments to the thesis or dissertation, with the amended thesis or dissertation being submitted no later than twelve months from the date of receipt of guidance from the examining team **in the case of the PhD and the professional doctorate**, and three months (ninety days) from receipt of guidance from the examining team **in the case of the MRes**. The examiners will provide written guidance to the candidate, via the Graduate School, on what amendments and corrections are required. The internal examiner will confirm that the amendments have been addressed. Confirmation of the amendments having been addressed shall constitute a recommendation

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<sup>23</sup> The process of making amendments and corrections (but not revisions for re-examination) following examination should, in the case of all research degrees, be one of dialogue between the PGR and the examiners prior to submission of the amended thesis or dissertation. As a consequence, the internal examiner will simply check that all of the amendments have been addressed; there should be no re-examination of the work at that point.

to the Graduate School Board of Studies that the candidate be awarded the degree;

- iv that the candidate be permitted to be re-examined for the degree, with a further oral examination (or approved alternative), with the revised thesis or dissertation being submitted no later than twelve months from the date of receipt of guidance from the examining team **in the case of the PhD and the professional doctorate**, and three months (ninety days) from receipt of guidance from the examining team **in the case of the MRes**. The examiners will provide written guidance to the candidate, via the Graduate School, on the deficiencies of the examination. Such guidance will not specify a series of actions to be taken by the candidate, but simply indicate general deficiencies;
- v that no award is made and that the candidate may not be re-examined. The examiners will prepare an agreed statement of the reasons for their recommendation which will be communicated to the candidate via the Graduate School;
- vi **in the case of a PhD**, that the candidate be awarded an MPhil without amendments being made to the thesis, or **in the case of the professional doctorate**, that the candidate be awarded an MRes without amendments being made to the thesis.
- vii **in the case of a PhD**, that the candidate be required to make amendments to the thesis for consideration for the award of MPhil, with the amended thesis being submitted no later than eight weeks (full-time) or twelve weeks (part-time) from the date of the receipt of guidance from the examining team. The examiners will provide written guidance to the candidate, via the Graduate School, on what amendments and corrections are required. In such cases the original submission will be amended. Candidates are not required to prepare a thesis in accordance with any different requirements, such as the preparation of a shorter thesis or dissertation. **In the case of the professional doctorate**, that the recommendation above applies, but for the award of MRes;
- viii **in the case of a PhD**, that the candidate be permitted to be re-examined for the award of MPhil, *without* a further oral examination (or approved alternative), with the revised thesis being submitted no later than twelve months from the date of the receipt of guidance from the examining team. The examiners will provide written guidance to the candidate via the Graduate School. Such guidance will not specify a series of actions to be taken by the candidate, but simply indicate general deficiencies. In such cases the original submission will be amended. Candidates are not required to prepare a thesis in accordance with any different

requirements, such as the preparation of a shorter thesis or dissertation.  
**In the case of the professional doctorate**, that the recommendation above applies, but for the award of MRes;

- ix **in the case of a PhD**, that the candidate be permitted to be re-examined for the award of MPhil, *with* a further oral examination (or approved alternative), with the revised thesis being submitted no later than twelve months from the date of the receipt of guidance from the examining team. The examiners will provide written guidance to the candidate via the Graduate School. Such guidance will not specify a series of actions to be taken by the candidate, but simply indicate general deficiencies. In such cases the original submission will be amended. Candidates are not required to prepare a thesis in accordance with any different requirements, such as the preparation of a shorter thesis or dissertation.  
**In the case of the professional doctorate**, that the recommendation above applies, but for the award MRes;
- x that the candidate be considered under the University's malpractice regulations.

All research degrees are awarded without classification.

N17.4 Where the examiners are not in agreement following the oral examination (or approved alternative), each examiner will prepare a separate report and recommendation, and those will be considered by the Graduate School Board of Studies. The Board will determine one of the following outcomes, depending on the nature of the case:

- 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.

Those outcomes are not a list of options all applying to each case. Rather:

- a. the first outcome is for cases in which a majority decision is possible, and the other outcomes should only be considered where no majority decision is possible.
- b. when no majority decision is possible, the second outcome should be chosen unless the Board has reason to have concerns about the performance or the recommendation of either the external examiner or both examiners.

If the concern relates only to the performance or recommendation of the internal examiner, the second outcome should be chosen.

- c. if the concern is over the performance or recommendation of the external examiner alone, the third outcome should be chosen.
- d. if the Board feels that the integrity of the examination has been compromised, such that none of the recommendations made by the examiners is reliable, the fourth outcome should be chosen

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

N17.5 Where an additional external examiner, or new examining team, is appointed, independent preliminary report(s) on the thesis will be prepared and, where necessary, a further oral examination (or approved alternative) will be conducted. The additional external examiner, or examining team, shall not be informed of the opinions or recommendations of the original examiners. Additional examination necessitated by a failure to agree a recommendation on the part of examiners shall not constitute re-examination.

N17.6 The Graduate School Board of Studies may require further examination as necessary to satisfy itself that the assessment criteria have been met and/or the examination operated appropriately.

### **N18. Re-examination**

N18.1 Only one re-examination for a research degree award is permitted. The whole thesis or dissertation will be re-examined.

N18.2 Where it is satisfied that just cause exists, the Graduate School Board of Studies may approve an extension to the resubmission timescales.

N18.3 Wherever possible, the examining team responsible for the final recommendation from the first examination will operate for re-examination except that the Graduate School Board of Studies may require that an additional external examiner be appointed. When a new examiner joins an examination panel for a re-examination (either because not all members of the original panel were available to conduct the re-examination, or because the Graduate School Board of Studies required the appointment of an additional examiner), that examiner will examine the whole thesis, and will in no way be bound by the decisions of examiners at the first examination.

N18.4 On submission of the revised thesis or dissertation, examiners will individually and independently complete preliminary report forms.

N18.5 Following the re-examination, the examiners will agree a written report and recommendation to the Graduate School Board of Studies.

N18.6 In the case of re-examination, the following recommendations are available to the examiners:

- i that the candidate be awarded the degree
- ii that the candidate be awarded the degree subject to amendments being made to the thesis or dissertation, with the amended thesis or dissertation being submitted no later than eight weeks from the date of the receipt of guidance from the examining team in the case of **the PhD or professional doctorate**, and four weeks **in the case of the MRes**. The examiners will provide written guidance to the candidate, via the Graduate School, on what amendments and corrections are required. The internal examiner will confirm that the amendments have been addressed. Confirmation of the amendments having been addressed shall constitute a recommendation to the Graduate School Board of Studies that the candidate be awarded the degree;
- iii that no award is made. The examiners will prepare an agreed statement of the reasons for their recommendation which will be communicated to the candidate via the Graduate School;
- iv **in the case of a PhD**, that the candidate be awarded an MPhil with or without amendments being made to the thesis, with the amended thesis (if required) being submitted no later than eight weeks full-time or twelve weeks part-time from the date of the receipt of guidance from the examining team. The examiners will provide written guidance to the candidate, via the Graduate School, on what amendments and corrections are required. The internal examiner will confirm that the amendments have been addressed. Confirmation of the amendments having been addressed shall constitute a recommendation to the Graduate School Board of Studies that the candidate be awarded the MPhil. **In the case of the professional doctorate**, that the recommendation above applies, but for the award of MRes;
- v that the candidate be considered under the University's malpractice regulations

N18.7 Where the examiners are not in agreement, the provisions of N17.4 apply.

N18.8 The Graduate School Board of Studies may require further examination as necessary to satisfy itself that the assessment criteria have been met and/or the examination operated appropriately.

## N19. Academic Malpractice

N19.1 Academic malpractice is regarded as a serious academic offence, especially within the context of a research degree. Details of what constitutes an academic offence are given in *Code of Practice for the Investigation of Research Misconduct*.

N19.2 All allegations of malpractice by the examiners, supervisors, or others in respect of research degrees will be referred to the common procedure outlined in *Schedule B* and a Panel of Inquiry will be established.

N19.3 The panel will comprise a chair (a dean or professor of the University) and two research active members of staff nominated by the Chair of the Graduate School Board of Studies. No member of the panel will have had any previous involvement with the candidate, nor will they be drawn from the subject area in which the candidate's research is based.

N19.4 The panel will meet as soon as possible and normally no later than thirty working days from the date an allegation is formally submitted.

N19.5 For the purposes of these regulations, the terms of reference of the panel of inquiry will be to determine whether malpractice has taken place and, if so, to make a recommendation to the Graduate School Board of Studies with respect to the penalty to be applied.

N19.6 The following recommendations are available to the panel:

- i The accusation is unfounded, and the candidate should be permitted to continue to examination without penalty;
- ii The accusation is upheld, and the candidate should be referred with an opportunity for retraining and resubmission under the re-examination regulations (section N18). (Note this recommendation is not available if the candidate is already registered for re-examination);
- iii The accusation is upheld, and the candidate should be failed outright with a recommendation for exclusion

N19.7 The Chair of the Graduate School Board of Studies will confirm the position of the candidate at the earliest opportunity and in any event within two weeks of the hearing.

N19.8 Candidates who are deemed to have committed malpractice under N19.5 have a right of appeal under the Appeals Procedures of the University (these can be found as an appendix of the University's general Academic Regulations).

N19.9 Where evidence of academic malpractice becomes available subsequent to an award having been made or recommended by the examiners, the malpractice regulations will be invoked, and the original decision may be set aside.

## N20. Procedural Reviews and Appeals

N20.1 All fail decisions, or awards made at a lower level than the registered award, will be reviewed for process and procedure by the Graduate School as a matter of good practice. The results of any such review will be noted, and if necessary discussed, by the Graduate School Board of Studies.

N20.2 PGRs may appeal Graduate School Board of Studies decisions relating to progression and award under the terms of the Appeals Procedure set out in the appendices of the general Academic Regulations.

## Endmatter

| Information      | Owner/Review                                    |
|------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Title            | Research Degree Regulations                     |
| Policy Owner     | Dr Leon Culbertson, Dean of the Graduate School |
| Approved by      | Academic Board                                  |
| Date of Approval | July 2025                                       |
| Date for Review  | July 2026                                       |