

Chapter 9

Quality Assurance of Research Degrees

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Table of Contents

1. SCOPE AND PURPOSE	4
2. PRINCIPLES	4
3. RESPONSIBLE STRUCTURES WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY.....	5
The Graduate School.....	5
Committee Structure	6
4. THE UNIVERSITY’S RESEARCH DEGREES	6
5. APPROVAL, MONITORING AND REVIEW IN RELATION TO RESEARCH DEGREES.....	7
Approval and modification of research degrees	7
Modifications of research degree routes	7
Approval of Professional Doctorate cohorts	8
Review of research degree routes	8
Review and approval of changes to Research Degrees Regulations.....	9
Review of Professional Doctorates	9
Admission to Edge Hill’s research degree programmes	10
Approval, monitoring of review of supervisory teams and supervisory capacity	12
Research student development.....	14
Approval of project registration	15
Ethical scrutiny and approval.....	17
Progression viva	17
Changes to registration.....	19
Change to mode of study.....	19
Interruption of study.....	20
Extension to the period of registration and to submission deadlines.....	20
Change in award level.....	21
Withdrawal and registration of termination for an Edge Hill University research degree .	21
Monitoring of student progress.....	22
The appointment of examiners	22
Appointment of viva chairs.....	23
Final examination.....	24

PhD by Publication	26
Academic malpractice.....	27
Academic appeals	28
Complaints	28
Student representation and student experience	28
Research students with teaching responsibilities	29
Employability.....	29
Working with third parties.....	29
Research degrees and collaborating institutions	29
1. Guaranteed access to physical resources.....	30
2. When Edge Hill University and a partner enter into a mutually beneficial agreement to work together, and within which a research degree forms an element of the work.....	30
3. When 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.....	30

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-E), 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 Studies⁴ (GSBoS) and the Graduate School,⁵ which, collectively, act as the focus for all processes and procedures relevant to the experience of research students whilst they are at the University. The Graduate School has devolved some responsibilities, but no powers, to the faculties in relation to day-to-day operational matters (such as arranging examinations) while maintaining oversight and ownership of, and responsibility for, the processes.

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 students 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 QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education,⁶ of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications⁷ 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

¹ By Order of the Privy Council, Edge Hill University was granted Research Degree Awarding Powers in August 2008.

² Available at www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/research-degree-regulations/.

³ Listed in Schedule E of the Research Degree Regulations.

⁴ For the Graduate School Board of Studies constitution and terms of reference see Quality Management Handbook (QMH) Chapter 8.

⁵ www.edgehill.ac.uk/graduateschool/.

⁶ www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code.

⁷ www.qaa.ac.uk/en/quality-code/qualifications-and-credit-frameworks.

independence - from the project and associated thesis or dissertation upon which the assessment of research students is based - of those taking decisions about the progression and examination of research students. 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 research students and supervisors.

Edge Hill regards its research students 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 outwith academia.

Edge Hill University supports lifelong learning, and this is reflected in the fact that a proportion of its research students 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, students, in particular through ensuring that mandatory training sessions and other obligatory processes are identified with as much notice as possible and are generally scheduled on the same single day (Wednesday) each week to assist those studying part-time, and Graduate Teaching Assistants who have teaching responsibilities.

3. RESPONSIBLE STRUCTURES WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY

The University's committee 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), that is ultimately responsible for research degrees at Edge Hill. The accountability of the GSBoS, 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 management of the Graduate School is based in the Research Office⁸ as is the central administration. Some of the day-to-day operation of processes is in the faculties. The Graduate School is essentially a complex network of academics, managers, administrators and structures, managed and coordinated by the Director and Assistant Director from the Research Office.

⁸ The Director and Assistant Director of the Research Office are also the Director and Assistant Director of the Graduate School.

The Graduate School is also responsible for taking a range of decisions in relation to research degree student registration during the periods between formal meetings of GSBoS. In relation to doctoral registrations, those decisions are taken in formal meetings by the Chair of the Graduate School Board of Studies (the Director of the Graduate School) and the Assistant Director for Postgraduate Research, with, where necessary, consultation with relevant staff, such as the Graduate School research degree contacts (there is one for each REF Unit of Assessment), the relevant Associate Dean with responsibility for research and research degrees, the Professional Doctorate Lead and/or the Academic Registrar, and, when the matter concerns a student's role as a GTA, the relevant Head of Department. In relation to the MRes, decisions are taken in formal meetings by the Assistant Director for Postgraduate Research and the MRes Lead and, again, involve consultation with relevant colleagues when necessary. Interim decisions such as these can be taken on matters including change of mode of registration, consideration of student progress, applications for interruption of studies, applications for extensions, confirmation of project registration or progression, approval of examination teams etc. All awards not made at a full meeting of GSBoS must be approved by the Chair of the Graduate School Board of Studies via chair's action, and termination of registration can only take place following consultation with the GSBoS. All interim decisions are reported to the next full meeting of GSBoS and recorded in the minutes of that meeting.

Committee Structure

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). The Chair of the GSBoS (currently the Director of the Research Office) is an ex-officio member of Academic Board. The GSBoS is responsible to Academic Board, via the University Research and Innovation Committee, for the assurance of the standards of the University's research degree awards. Academic Board maintains oversight of the GSBoS activities through receipt of a written summary and verbal report of the business conducted by the GSBoS at Academic Board's subsequent meeting. Additionally, a summary report of the GSBoS full year's business is considered by Academic Board at its meeting in the following autumn term.

The GSBoS has one sub-group - the Postgraduate Research Student Experience Sub- group, which is chaired by the Assistant Director for Postgraduate Research. The constitution and terms of reference for that sub-group are in Chapter 8 of the QMH.

4. THE UNIVERSITY'S RESEARCH DEGREES

Edge Hill currently awards four research degrees, the Master by Research (MRes), the Master of Philosophy (MPhil), which cannot be a target award and is only awarded to PhD candidates unsuccessful in gaining a doctorate following final examination for a doctorate,

the Professional Doctorate and the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). The PhD may be obtained either by students following the conventional route, or by staff or former staff submitting a portfolio of published work; 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 the Graduate School Board of Studies.

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 the Graduate School Board of Studies for consideration. The Board may suggest modifications, request further developmental work, or approve the proposals in their entirety. The process is coordinated by the Assistant Director for Postgraduate Research, who then makes the necessary alterations to the Research Degree Regulations through the formal process for amending those regulations.

⁹<http://eshare.edgehill.ac.uk/15194/>.

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 by GSBoS 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 GSBoS 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 the GSBoS that considers the application and are questioned by members of the Board. The Board 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. The Board also stipulates a maximum number of students 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 students 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).

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 student 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 student progress and experiences includes formal annual appraisal conducted by the Graduate School Board of Studies, formal review of student 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 student that is afforded by the production of a short report by the student 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 student who has been struggling or who is returning from a period of interruption of studies. The Board also oversees the approval of supervisory teams informed by regular capacity and reciprocity checks made by the Graduate School to ensure that, before accepting a student, 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 involves consideration by the Graduate School of relevant developments in relation to research degrees that emerge from the work of the 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 research student experience through the work of the Graduate School Board of Studies Research Student Experience Sub-group, Postgraduate Research Student Representatives and the associated research student 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 April meeting of the Graduate School Board of Studies, and, if necessary, at the final GSBoS meeting of the academic year. They are then 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 the GSBoS 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 the GSBoS.

Admission to Edge Hill's research degree programmes

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, 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 Admissions Office,¹⁰ which processes them and sends them to the relevant department where scrutiny of both application and references is undertaken. Where an applicant's qualifications and references are satisfactory and there is the potential to offer appropriate supervision and provide the necessary facilities, s/he may be offered an interview. In the 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 asking Admissions to make an offer to the student.¹¹ All PhD, professional doctorate, and non-UK or EU MRes applicants that are offered a place must have been interviewed. The decision as to whether to conduct an interview for UK and EU 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 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

¹⁰ www.edgehill.ac.uk/admissions/.

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

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 student may develop a detailed research proposal for which the University cannot provide appropriate supervision or the facilities for its successful completion. Equally, the detailed proposal may prove to be of insufficient quality.

The initial stage of the programme consists in the students 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 student will be encouraged to seek registration for a research degree at another university where appropriate supervision and facilities are available.

Enrolment for research degrees at Edge Hill is at a single enrolment point determined each year by the Graduate School. The enrolment point is usually in the autumn (September or October). This not only helps ensure that research students are part of a cohort, but also means that all students have the same experience in relation to researcher development and training opportunities, as they all have full access to the programme of sessions coordinated by the Graduate School. In certain very exceptional circumstances (related to some external funding conditions), and only in the case of the PhD, a student may be permitted to begin study at a specified date later in the academic year (the date being determined by the Graduate School in consultation with Academic Registry). However, that is not desirable, and is discouraged, because the programme of researcher development and research student training sessions is extensive and cannot be repeated for students beginning their studies at an atypical point in the academic year. Such students cannot, therefore, have the same quality of experience as students beginning their studies at the standard enrolment point. To mitigate this state of affairs as much as possible, students 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 students) for all sessions that the incoming student will miss as a result of the atypical enrolment point.

The GSBOS 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 recommendation to the GSBOS 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 the Assistant Director for Postgraduate Research or a Graduate School nominee, and the University's English language requirements must be met.

Approval, monitoring of review of supervisory teams and supervisory capacity¹²

Supervisors of doctoral students must be active researchers currently involved in the production of peer-reviewed publications, and with a recent record of such publications. Edge Hill University doctoral students 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 student 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 students will standardly have one supervisor, but some students 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

¹² Candidates for PhD by publication are not students, 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.

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 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 at an interim decisions meeting.

Assurance of the quality of supervision provided for the University's doctoral students rests with the Graduate School and GSBoS. It is for that reason that the Graduate School must approve any permanent changes to supervisory arrangements, which are then noted by GSBoS. 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 student is not disadvantaged in project progression.

There will inevitably be situations where difficulties arise in the relationship between research student and supervisor. Where this is the case, the parties should initially seek to resolve these informally by involving, where s/he 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 students and Directors of Studies (on behalf of the supervisory team) each write separate reports on the student'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 permitted to rise, in the most extreme cases, above nine research degree students in total, a maximum of six of which can be doctoral students),¹³ 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

¹³ Those figures are maximums for the most experienced supervisors, not a standard supervisory load. Many supervisors will not be permitted such a load.

supervisory capacity, as examiners cannot have had any involvement in the supervision of students whom they examine. Graduate School research degree contacts are responsible for monitoring supervisory capacity within their unit of assessment, but the Graduate School also monitors capacity independently. In addition, capacity is considered on every occasion on which a supervisory team is approved.

Research student development

Research student development takes five different forms:¹⁴

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

The design and delivery of the core and PhD development sessions is co-ordinated by the Assistant Director for Postgraduate Research in consultation with the MRes Lead, the Professional Doctorate Lead, the MRes Co-ordinators (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 (broadly equivalent to each REF unit of assessment). The design of the core research student development programme is informed by benchmarking and consideration of evaluations of previous training. As part of the evaluation of all research student training, students are asked whether there are any topics they feel should be added to the programme.

The design and delivery of the methodological development programme is co-ordinated by the MRes Lead and overseen by the Assistant Director for Postgraduate Research. The three MRes coordinators consult with staff in their respective broad disciplinary categories (social science, science, and arts & humanities), and propose content for up to six sessions in each

¹⁴ 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/>.

broad disciplinary category. In addition, some cross-disciplinary topics are identified and included in the programme as extra sessions.

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

All research student development activities are evaluated annually by the Graduate School and the development programme as a whole is considered on an annual basis by the GSBoS.

Approval of project registration

The GSBoS is the body that formally approves a programme of research as being appropriate for a student 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.¹⁵ This panel generally comprises three research-active members of staff, one of whom will normally be a member of the student'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 the Graduate School and GSBoS. The recommendation and paperwork are considered by the Graduate School and the outcome of that consideration is noted 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 student should revise and resubmit the proposal for re-examination (with a viva for doctoral degrees);¹⁶
- III. Following a re-examination, the submission is not of an appropriate standard, so the project should not be registered (the student's enrolment will therefore be terminated by the Board); or
- IV. The student should be considered under the University's malpractice regulations.

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

¹⁵ <http://eshare.edgehill.ac.uk/id/document/31908> illustrates the approval process for research project registration.

¹⁶ Where the student'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.

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

- I. the research student is suitably qualified;
- II. the programme of research submitted by the applicant is viable and appropriate to the standard of the award sought;
- 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 student 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. 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 research student 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 aims are achieved, there is no reason not to recommend registration of the project.

Ethical scrutiny and approval

Research proposals must adhere to the Research Ethics Policy.¹⁷ 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 student's research and their preparedness for a final viva examination, subsequent to the submission of a completed thesis.¹⁸ This provides the University, 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 University, again acting through the GSBoS, to assure itself that the student is making intellectual developments appropriate to examination at the relevant level. Supervisors can also observe their student'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 students 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 students, or thirty-six months for part-time, and

¹⁷ 2019/20 policy link - www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/research-ethics-policy/.

¹⁸ <http://eshare.edgehill.ac.uk/id/document/31901> illustrates the approval process for progression examination.

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;
- III. The written work to date,¹⁹ 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 (plus an independent chair), 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. The chair of the panel will be appointed in accordance with rules agreed by the GSBoS (see 'Appointment of Viva Chairs' below). Amendment to these arrangements requires the approval of the Chair of the GSBoS or the Assistant Director for Postgraduate Research on behalf of the Chair 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 student is allowed a period of no more than eight weeks (for full-time students) or twelve weeks (for part-time students) to make a re-submission. In the

¹⁹ 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).

case of a decision to refer an application for further work, written feedback will be provided by the panel chair for transmission to the student. In the event that a panel has not included a member of the student'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. Students who are refused permission 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 students through a process co-ordinated by the MRes Lead on behalf of the Graduate School. The process is similar to that employed by the Graduate School for reviewing student progress (see note 22 below). The reports are considered by a panel drawn from the MRes co-ordinators, and also including the MRes Lead and, where necessary, the Assistant Director for Postgraduate Research.

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 study²⁰
- 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 students, including the capacity to admit new students. Those issues are related to the allocation of (human) resources and planning, as the decision to admit a student is based on an

²⁰ For example, from part-time to full-time.

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 student. 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.

Interruption of study

Where a student is prevented from making progress with their programme of study because of illness or other reasonable cause, they may seek an interruption of study; students 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 student 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 student'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 appropriate for examination for the degree for which a student 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, students must provide an appropriate reason for the request, and the Graduate School considers the impact of granting the request on the student'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 research student 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, s/he 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. Students 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 students to transfer to a higher level of research degree.

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

If a student ends his or her registration, that is a withdrawal. If the University ends a student's registration, that is a termination of registration. Where the Graduate School becomes aware that a research student 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 student was based.

Where a supervisory team becomes aware that a research student 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 student who has withdrawn.

In the event that the GSBoS is of the opinion that a student is not making satisfactory academic progress and/or it is evident that s/he is no longer in contact with her/his supervisory team, the GSBoS may formally take the initiative and terminate a 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 student's progress will be placed under review for a specified period of time before withdrawal is recommended, however, the formal process for review of student progress is not required, and the Board can terminate registration at any point if progress is deemed inadequate by the Board.²¹

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

²¹ <http://eshare.edgehill.ac.uk/9099/> outlines the progress review process.

Monitoring of student progress

The University operates an appraisal system in relation to research degree registrations involving both the research student and the Director of Studies (on behalf of the supervisory team). Both are required to independently complete a pro forma and provide a written report, which are considered through a Graduate School process that results in those cases judged in need of consideration being referred to the final meeting of the GSBoS in each academic year. The appraisal is required for students 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 student 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 student's progress under review. Any student who is denied progression or whose registration is terminated under these regulations may appeal on procedural grounds using the University's Appeals Procedures.²²

The appointment of examiners

Examination teams are nominated by the supervisory team but are appointed by the GSBoS if considered at a full meeting of the Board, or the Graduate School if considered at an interim decisions meeting. The Director of Studies for a research student is responsible for submitting proposals for the examination team to a meeting of the GSBoS or an interim decisions meeting which takes place at least three months prior to the proposed date of the examination.

Each research student 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 research student 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 research students at the level of the award being examined. Examiners must be experienced in research in the general area of the student's thesis and, where practicable, will have specialist experience in the particular topic that is the subject of

²² www.edgehill.ac.uk/graduateschool/regulations/.

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 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 student has pursued his or her research, any research partner or collaborating institution and the research project upon which the student's thesis is based. This means that an external examiner may not have acted previously as the student's supervisor or advisor, nor be either a supervisor of another research student or, during the previous three years, have been an external examiner on a taught course in the same department in which the student is studying. Additionally, the GSBoS and the Graduate School act 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 research student's supervisor or formal advisor to be a member of the examination team for that student.

Appointment of viva chairs

The Graduate School nominates 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 student is based.

Final examination

The final examination of Edge Hill University's research degrees²³ 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 student. Should a student 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 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.

In order to maintain a degree of distance between participants in the examination of a thesis, students 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 to the relevant faculty research office 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

²³ <http://eshare.edgehill.ac.uk/id/document/31902> illustrates the process for final examination.

other in the preparation of the pre-viva reports. When all the reports have been received by the relevant faculty research administrator, 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 the relevant faculty research office with written guidance on the deficiencies of the thesis for the student 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:

- 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 GSBoS 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 *student* 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 research student development activity. In the case of the PhD by publication candidates never have the status of students, do not follow a programme of research student 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's²⁴ 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:

²⁴ Restricted to current staff and previous members of staff of the University who meet certain criteria.

- I. Stage 1: establishing the *prima facie* case;
- II. Stage 2: production of an analytical commentary and portfolio; and
- III. 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 recognised by the Graduate School, with the appointment of the final PhD viva panel. The candidate is not considered to be a student of the University, as the research has already been completed.

The Graduate School has produced detailed guidelines for prospective candidates and makes them available to staff at the appropriate time. The Assistant Director for Postgraduate Research 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 less 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).²⁵

²⁵ www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/research-degree-regulations/.

All research students must adhere to the University's Code of Practice for the Conduct of Research. If an individual suspects misconduct, s/he should refer to the Code of Practice for the Reporting of Research Misconduct.²⁶

Academic appeals

If students feel that they have suitable grounds for appeal, they may appeal Graduate School Board of Studies decisions relating to progression and award, or those of malpractice panels, under the terms of the Academic Appeals Procedure set out in the general academic regulations.²⁷

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

Complaints

If a student has a complaint regarding a service that the University provides, the University has a published Complaints Procedure.²⁸ Students 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.

Student representation and student experience

Research Student Representatives are elected each year through the Students' Union, independently of the Graduate School. The elected representatives are members of the Graduate School Board of Studies Research Student Experience Sub-group, which coordinates the process for student representation.²⁹

In addition to addressing any institutional-level matters that arise from the three-level process, the Graduate School Board of Studies Research Student Experience Sub-group looks closely at the feedback collected from the Research Student Representatives and an informal feedback survey and reports the results to the GSBoS. For the 2020/21 academic year, the Graduate School Board of Studies has agreed to introduce a new institutional survey that is tailored to the Edge Hill PGR experience in order to assess the support

²⁶ These codes are available for download from www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/code-practice-reporting-research-misconduct/.

²⁷ www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/appendix-22-academic-appeals-procedures-2018-19-2/.

²⁸ www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/complaints-procedure/.

²⁹ <http://eshare.edgehill.ac.uk/13905/17/Process%20-%20Student%20Feedback%20Visio.png>.

required for our students in a more accurate way than was possible using the national PRES survey.

Research students with teaching responsibilities

The Graduate Teaching Assistant studentship schemes is an institutional scheme coordinated by the Graduate School with the assistance of Human Resources, the faculties and the departments in which students in receipt of a studentship are housed. 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 students 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 students in receipt of a studentship, particularly those that involve teaching. Equally, the Graduate School Board of Studies requires that, if a student does not meet the required academic standards, the fact that student is in receipt of a studentship has no bearing on the decision-making process in relation to the student's progress.

Employability

The centrality of the Researcher Development Framework to the experience of research students 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, development sessions provided in the second semester of each academic year is principally focussed on preparing students 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 remuneration 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.³⁰

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

³⁰ <https://go.edgehill.ac.uk/display/finance/Policy+and+Procedures>.

made aware of, and agree to, the details at the point of registration of the programme of work.

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 Board of Studies is required to ensure that access is guaranteed.

The Board 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 Board at the point of project registration.

2. When Edge Hill University and a partner enter into a mutually beneficial agreement to work together, and within which a research degree forms an element of the work.

The University's academic framework aligns with the UK Code of Practice for Higher Education. The code 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. Such arrangements are rare because the University does not enter into collaborations to provide joint or dual awards.

The research degree programme may not be formally registered until a formal signed agreement between the partners is approved. Such partnerships vary considerably, and there is no standard template to follow. Advice may be sought from the Research Office.

The agreements 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. When 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 student fails to successfully negotiate the project registration examination process, or, indeed, the progression examination process, or the student's registration is terminated by the GSBoS for any reason, or the student withdraws, the agreement ends and the University returns any unspent funds. Such agreements vary considerably, and there is no standard template to follow. **Advice must be sought from the Research Office.**

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 student and the University manage the research, and the sponsor cannot dictate the direction in which the research develops.