Quality Assurance of Research Degrees

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1. **SCOPE AND PURPOSE**

This chapter describes the processes which Edge Hill University has put in place to assure the quality of the research degrees which it awards in its own name. It also discusses the rationale for these processes and the form they take.

The processes are situated centrally and managed through the Graduate School Board of Studies and the organisational unit the Graduate School which acts as the focus for all processes and procedures relevant to the experience of research students whilst they are at the University. The GSBOS has devolved a range of responsibilities to the faculties in relation to day-to-day operational matters while maintaining oversight of the processes.

The University’s Research Degree Regulations should always be used as the point of reference, and in no way are modified or overturned by the more general outline descriptions given in this chapter.

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 programmes of study. Those experiences involve an admission interview and vivas at both registration for a higher degree by research, and also at an appraisal point once the route to final submission is clear (or at transfer of registration from MPhil to PhD for those initially registered for MPhil).

In the development of its policies and procedures Edge Hill takes full account of Chapter B11 ‘Research Degrees’ of the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education, of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (QAA, 2014) and of practice across the higher education sector. The University’s policies and procedures are transparent and conducted in such a way as to ensure, as far as is possible, the independence - from the project and associated thesis 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 Wiki which are updated annually and made available to research students.

Edge Hill regards its research students as being early career researchers who are following Research Degree Programmes (RDPs) which will prepare them for careers not only as researchers.

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1. By Order of the Privy Council, Edge Hill University was granted its own Research Degree Awarding Powers in August 2008. Hitherto, MPhil and PhD research degrees of Lancaster University have been awarded.
2. For the Graduate School Board of Studies constitution and terms of reference see Quality Management Handbook (QMH) Chapter 8.
3. http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/graduateschool/
4. https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/graduateschool/regulations/
and university staff but also, through the development of generic skills and reflection on the learning they bring to their RDP, for careers outwith academia. In doing this, the University takes full cognizance that a number of its research students will currently be working as experienced professionals and that some will have retired from paid employment, and is committed to ensuring that its processes are designed with their needs in mind.

Edge Hill University supports lifelong learning and this is reflected in the fact that a significant proportion of its research students study in part-time mode. The institution is committed to ensuring that its RDP processes are designed to meet the needs of part-time, as well as full-time, students.

3. RESPONSIBLE STRUCTURES WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY

The University’s research degrees are awarded by the Academic Board, which devolves its powers in this respect to the Graduate School Board of Studies (GSBOS). The Chair of the GSBOS (Director of the Research Office) is an ex-officio member of the Academic Board. The GSBOS is responsible to the Board, via the Research Committee, for the assurance of the standards of the University’s research degree awards and for the development and operation of the processes and procedures of all aspects of research degree registrations, progression and examination.

Academic Board maintains oversight of the GSBOS’s 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’s full year’s business is considered by the Board at its meeting in the following Autumn term.

The GSBOS formally delegates the approval (validation), monitoring, review and modification of MRes programmes to the Academic Quality Enhancement Committee (AQEC)\(^8\). Under this arrangement the GSBOS remains the awarding authority for MRes awards and retains ownership of the enabling MRes Framework and regulations. Validation is by a specially-constituted subgroup of AQEC’s Validation and Audit Sub-Committee (VASC) Standing Panel\(^9\). Programme monitoring, review (including re-validation) and modification follow the same processes as for taught Masters degrees and AQEC reports periodically to the GSBOS to assure the Board that delegated functions have been discharged appropriately. The detailed quality assurance processes for MRes programmes are described elsewhere in this chapter.

Professional doctorate programmes, which also contain taught level 7 elements, are validated through the VASC Standing Panel which reports directly to the GSBOS where final programme approval is conferred. Monitoring, review and modification of level 7 modules follow the same processes as for Masters programmes and AQEC reports periodically to the GSBOS to assure the Board that these functions have been discharged appropriately. The GSBOS monitors and reviews student performance and the quality of the student learning experience and takes decisions on programme re-approval. The detailed quality assurance processes for professional doctorate programmes are described elsewhere in this chapter.

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\(^8\) Ibid.
\(^9\) Ibid, also [http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/aqdu/VASC_Standing_Panel/](http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/aqdu/VASC_Standing_Panel/)
The processes relating to the quality of the University’s RDPs are managed on a day-to-day basis by the Research Office and operationalised by the faculties.

4. THE UNIVERSITY’S RESEARCH DEGREES

Edge Hill currently awards four research degrees, the Masters by Research (MRes)\textsuperscript{10}, the Master of Philosophy (MPhil), the Professional Doctorate and the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). The PhD may be obtained either by submitting a standard dissertation, or by submitting a portfolio of published work; in each case assessment is by a \textit{viva voce} examination. The characteristics of each award are as follows.

\textit{Masters by Research (FHEQ Level 7)}

The MRes is awarded to a candidate who, having critically investigated and evaluated an approved topic and demonstrated an understanding of 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.

\textit{Master of Philosophy (FHEQ Level 7)}

The MPhil is awarded to a candidate who, having critically investigated and evaluated an approved topic and demonstrated an understanding of 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.

\textit{Doctor of Philosophy (FHEQ Level 8)}\textsuperscript{11}

The PhD is awarded to a candidate who, having critically investigated and evaluated an approved topic resulting in an independent, significant and original contribution to knowledge and demonstrated an understanding of research methodology appropriate to the field of study, has presented and defended a thesis\textsuperscript{12}, by oral examination (or approved alternative), to the satisfaction of the appointed examiners.

\textit{Professional Doctorate (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 understanding of research methodology appropriate to the profession. The candidate must have undertaken discipline-specific and research training within the taught elements of the programme, and presented and defended a thesis based upon their personal research, by oral examination (or approved alternative), to the satisfaction of the appointed examiners.

\begin{itemize}
  \item\textsuperscript{10} Other Masters titles (MA, MSc, LLM and any other 180 credit masters level degree approved by Academic Board) may still be approved as a Masters by Research so long as they are congruent with the MRes Academic Regulations.
  \item\textsuperscript{11} Including PhD by Publication
  \item\textsuperscript{12} In the case of PhD by Publication, an analytical commentary and portfolio of associated publications
\end{itemize}
5. THE RESEARCH STUDENT EXPERIENCE

The Masters by Research (MRes)

The MRes degree normally contains 60 credits of taught research training at Level 7, followed by a 120 credit individual research module (programme). The taught research training may be no less than 40 credits and no more than 80 credits. The taught modules are graded fail/pass/merit/distinction, whereas the research element (and the degree itself) are unclassified. The research project may not be condoned. Students who successfully complete 60 credits of research training will generally be awarded a postgraduate certificate (PG Cert) if they subsequently fail to complete the entire MRes.

Each MRes programme is approved through a formal validation process by suitably-qualified members of the Validation and Audit Sub-Committee (VASC) Standing Panel\(^\text{13}\) where the balance between taught and research elements is justified, modules and PgC exit award approved and supervision and other support confirmed. Following validation, final programme approval is by the Academic Quality Enhancement Committee (AQEC) operating with the delegated authority of the GSBOS. Programme modification follows the same processes as for other level 7 Masters degrees, with minor modifications approved by faculties and major modifications by AQEC via the VASC Standing Panel. Department/subject-level annual monitoring and periodic review processes enable oversight of the standards set and achieved and the quality of the student learning experience. Successful periodic review confers continuing approval of the programme/award while the modules are reviewed and renewed individually every five years using faculty approval processes. AQEC reports periodically to the GSBOS to confirm the approval of new MRes awards and assure the Board that all delegated quality functions have been discharged appropriately.

For admission to the MRes a candidate must hold at least an upper second class honours degree from a UK HEI, its equivalent from an HEI outwith the UK, or other equivalent qualifications.

MRes programmes are managed within academic departments, and the assessment of modules is conducted within the department and faculty in accordance with the University's Academic Regulations\(^\text{14}\). The host faculty convenes the module assessment boards. The progression and award board for Masters degrees by Research is the GSBOS.

An external examiner is appointed for each named MRes degree programme, and oversees the assessment of all contributing modules in accordance with the University’s procedures for the external examining of taught provision\(^\text{15}\).

An internal supervisor is appointed for each research project. Supervisors must be active researchers currently involved in the production of peer-reviewed publications, and with a recent record of such publications.

\(^{13}\) For more information on the VASC Standing Panel including criteria for the selection of MRes validation panels see QMH Chapter 8 and http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/aadu/VASC_Standing_Panel/.
\(^{14}\) Available at http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/governance/strategies-policies/.
\(^{15}\) As described in QMH Chapter 2.
Final assessment of the research project will be by dissertation or other appropriate body of work (up to 30,000 words) and viva. The viva panel should comprise at least one internal and one external examiner (who may, if the discipline match is appropriate, also be the external examiner for the programme). An internal examiner shall act as the chair. Written reports from the viva assessments are retained and made available to the programme external examiner such that s/he is able to verify that processes have been applied in a consistent, fair and appropriate manner, and that standards are being maintained.

Research proposals should receive ethical approval according to the University’s ethical framework. No primary research may start until a proposal has gained the appropriate ethical approval.

**Admission to Edge Hill’s MPhil and PhD Research Degree Programmes**

A candidate must hold at least an upper second class honours degree from a UK HEI, its equivalent from an HEI outwith 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 an RDP are received by the Admissions Office 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. A report of the interview and the decision of the panel is prepared by the panel chair. The panel may place conditions on the offer of a place on an RDP which may include a requirement that further preparatory study be undertaken.

Applicants are made aware that admission to the University does not guarantee registration for a research degree, as a student may develop a detailed research proposal for which the University cannot provide appropriate supervision or the facilities for its successful completion.

The initial stage of the programme consists of the students developing a detailed research proposal which is examined by a registration viva: if successful, the student and the research project are registered. 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.

To help ensure that research students are part of a cohort, but also to maintain maximum flexibility, there are normally two enrolment points during the academic session: September and January.

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16 [http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/admissions/](http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/admissions/)
The GSBOS may accept applications for PhD direct entry from candidates who are already registered for a PhD in another UK research degree awarding institution, and from 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 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, and the documentary requirements will be established by the Graduate School. However, in all cases, an admissions interview must be conducted, and the University’s English language requirements must be met.

Registration for the Degree of PhD

All students are registered for a programme of study leading to a PhD. There is the possibility of transferring on to a path leading to the exit award of MPhil if it becomes apparent that the research programme will not lead to a PhD.

Minimum, expected and maximum periods of registration are laid out in the University’s Research Degree Regulations. Both students and supervisors will work to ensure submission of a thesis suitable for examination within the maximum period permitted, and normally in the expected time to completion specified in the Research Degree Regulations. The ability to manage a research project to completion within a given timeframe is one of the transferable skills expected of graduates of the University’s research degree programmes. Where a student on an RDP has not submitted a thesis by the expiry of the maximum period of registration, the GSBOS may exceptionally, and with good reason, allow additional time subject to annual review.

Students are permitted a period of pre-registration work prior to the registration of their research project. A detailed research degree proposal of up to 15,000 words is prepared by the student, and is used as the basis for a registration viva. The GSBOS is the body which formally approves a programme of research as being appropriate for a student seeking the award of an Edge Hill University research degree although, in making its decision, it takes the advice of a Registration Review Panel appointed by the relevant Faculty Associate Dean for Research. 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 rules agreed by the GSBOS. The panel provides a written report containing a recommendation to the GSBOS. Exceptions to the above arrangements for panel membership require the approval of the Chair of the GSBOS.

The Panel’s recommendation is one of the following:

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17 It should be noted that since 2013-14 all students register directly onto the PhD programme rather than MPhil/PhD, there are a number of students who are completing their studies under the previous system which would include a transfer viva rather than a progression viva (detailed below): the nature and content of that process mirrors exactly the process for the progression viva: details can be found in the Research Degree Regulations.
18 24/36 months respectively for FT/PT PhD study.
19 36/54 months respectively for FT/PT study.
20 Normally 48/72 months respectively for FT/PT PhD study.
21 Up to four months for full-time students, and up to seven months for part-time students.
i. The student should be registered for the degree for which registration is sought;
ii. The student should be registered for MPhil only in the first instance; or that
iii. The student should not be registered for a research degree at the present time.

Should the panel recommend that registration not be permitted, a prospective research student will have one opportunity to re-submit an application and be re-examined.

In order to satisfy itself 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.

Applications may be referred back to the research student and supervisory team for further work and re-presentation.

Research proposals should receive ethical approval according to the University’s ethical framework. No primary research or data collection may start until a proposal has gained the appropriate ethical approval.

It is the GSBOS’s responsibility to confirm the date of registration; this is generally deemed to be the date of the committee meeting at which approval of the research programme is obtained, unless the committee approves backdating to a date not earlier than the date of the Panel meeting recommending approval of the registration. In order for this to be considered, the GSBOS must be provided with an appropriate justification.

In order to assist their development all students will be given mandatory research student training and offered opportunities to acquire appropriate generic and transferable skills as part of the University’s Research Support Programme and through other relevant events. Additionally, all students are encouraged to maintain a Personal Development Plan (PDP) and will be provided with the tools to do so when they register. Elements of the PDP relating to the student’s record of supervisory meetings and any events and activities they have undertaken which could support their programme of related studies are required to be submitted to the GSBOS as part of the annual monitoring process.
Supervision

The selection and oversight of supervisory teams for MRes students is the responsibility of the host academic department, which will have declared the appropriate processes at the validation of the MRes.

It is a key part of the GSBOS’s responsibility to ensure that students pursuing doctoral research are supported by appropriate supervision, it being recognised that the supervisor makes a significant contribution to the quality of the student’s experience and that good supervision can have a positive impact on the length of time it takes to submit a thesis. 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, at least one of whom will have previous experience of successful supervision at the level of the award for which the student is registered. 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 be drawn from outwith the University.

Supervisors are expected to:

- explore fully the student's background at the outset, and identify areas where further skills (including language) development is needed;
- engage with the student in the use of the PDP;
- give guidance on and maintain oversight of:
  - the nature of research and the standard expected;
  - the planning of the research programme;
  - attendance at appropriate courses;
  - literature and sources;
  - ethical issues relevant to the student’s project;
  - laboratory techniques, if relevant;
  - sources of information on intellectual property rights.
- be aware of the particular difficulties faced by many overseas students, who may initially need very frequent contact and advice on facilities, training courses, language tuition, etc.;
- check on the student's progress at regular intervals;

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22 In the case of PhD by Publication, since the research has already been completed, a mentor will be appointed to support the candidate in the formulation of their analytical commentary. Mentors should however, meet the University’s criteria for appointment as a supervisor.
• allocate a reasonable period of time for supervisory sessions: Supervisors should ensure that as far as possible supervision sessions are uninterrupted by telephone calls, personal callers or departmental business;
• deal with urgent problems as soon as possible, either over the telephone, via e-mail, or through a meeting arranged at short notice;
• read and provide constructive comments on any work submitted by the student within a reasonable time period (normally within four weeks although it may be necessary to allow longer for substantial pieces of work, such as a draft chapter);
• ensure that the student is made aware if either progress or the standard of work is unsatisfactory, and arrange any necessary supportive action. If the lack of progress is due to a significant personal problem a period of intercalation may be appropriate, and this possibility should be discussed with the student;
• carry out an annual review of student progress;
• take steps to ensure that the student is given proper guidance on the use of specialist equipment and techniques;
• take an active part in introducing the student to meetings of learned societies, seminars and workshops and to other research workers in the field, and give advice on writing up the research for publication;
• put the student in touch with specialists inside or outside the University if the student’s work goes significantly outside the supervisor’s field;
• inform the student of any periods of absence from the University, so that the student can plan accordingly;
• make appropriate supervision arrangements for students whose normal place of research is somewhere other than Edge Hill University, and liaise with any external supervisors and advisors.

It is possible for one or more advisors to be attached to an RDP, each of whom can contribute either specialised knowledge or a link with an external organisation or collaborating institution.

In order to ensure that potential conflicts of interest are minimised, any person registered for a higher degree by research, whether at Edge Hill or another university, is generally ineligible to act as a member of a supervisory team although they may be appointed as an adviser.

Recognising that the supervision of a research student is a significant responsibility and to ensure that supervisors are not overburdened, the maximum number of students that can normally be supervised concurrently by an individual member of staff of the University is six. PVC/Deans of Faculty and Heads of Department/Area are responsible for ensuring that the workload allocation model takes account of the requirements for research student supervision.

For professional doctorates, each student will have a team of two or three supervisors. One must have supervised to successful completion, the Director of Studies must be a member of Edge Hill staff, but in addition, one of the team should be appointed from within the profession (not necessarily an academic). If none of the supervisory team have such professional experience, then a specialist advisor will be appointed to bring specific professional expertise to the team. There
should be regular contact between the student, the supervisory team and the advisor throughout the entire research programme.

Assurance of the quality of supervision provided for the University’s doctoral students rests with GSBOS which must approve any permanent changes to supervisory arrangements. Where a change is necessitated by the ill-health, retirement or other long-term unavailability of a member of the supervisory team, appropriate alternative arrangements must be proposed by the relevant PVC/Dean of Faculty or Head of Department/Area 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 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 good offices of the relevant Head of Department/Area, PVC/Dean of Faculty, the Assistant Director for Postgraduate Research or the Director of the Research Office should be sought. Exceptionally, changes may be made to supervisory arrangements by the GSBOS.

**Progression viva to confirm registration**

Approximately half-way through a student’s programme of research, there will be an opportunity to confirm, in a formal setting, the robustness of the ideas and their preparedness for a final examination viva, subsequent to the submission of a completed thesis. 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 doctoral 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 students must submit a progression application to the GSBOS. Normally, an application should be submitted no later than eighteen months from first registration for full-time students, or thirty-six months for part-time, and applications must be supported by the supervisory team. An application must be accompanied by a report of no more than 6,000 words outlining:

i. Progress to date in the literature review, methodological development and data collection;

ii. The original contribution to knowledge that will be made by the research;

iii. The written work to date\(^{23}\), 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.

\(^{23}\) The written work should normally comprise at one draft chapter of the dissertation. Where work has already been published, the candidate might find it helpful to make reference to the appropriate publication.

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The content is from the Quality Management Handbook of Edge Hill University, specifically Chapter 9: Quality Assurance of Research Degrees. The document is published by Edge Hill University and contains institutional contact information.
Applications are initially assessed by a Review Panel, appointed by the Faculty Associate Dean for Research, by means of a formal presentation of the application by the student and a viva. The Review 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. 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 Review Panel will prepare a report making one of the following recommendations to the GSBOS:

i. That the application for progression be approved and that the student remains registered for PhD;
ii. That the application be referred back for further work and resubmitted.

The GSBOS will make the final decision and where a referral by the 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 case of a decision to refer an application for further work, written feedback will be provided to the Faculty 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, a student will be offered transfer to MPhil. Students who are refused permission to transfer at the second submission may appeal under the Appeals Procedure described within the Research Degree Regulations.

**Edge Hill Professional Doctorates**

Edge Hill’s framework for professional doctorates aligns with the QAA’s UK Quality Code for Higher Education, with 180 credits of taught material, followed by a Level 8 (doctoral) dissertation of 360 credits (equivalent to two years of full-time research). The taught modules are positioned at Level 7 within the FHEQ. The taught elements of the Professional Doctorate will be cohort-based. The individual research element will progress at an appropriate pace for the individual student.

Graduates are awarded the pre-nominal title of ‘Doctor’, wear the same academic dress as PhD graduates, but the post-nominal abbreviation contains the name of the subject discipline (eg EdD; DMus; D ClinPsy; EngD; DBA; DArch; D CrimJ; DP harm; DSocSci; ThD).

The 180 taught credits are normally broken into three 60 credit segments (each of which could be further subdivided). The three segments will be broadly designated as:
• Research training,
• Discipline-specific, and
• The detailed doctoral research proposal.

The detailed research proposal module will provide support as the full 6-10,000 word doctoral proposal is developed. The proposal is required to identify specifically how conducting the research will develop the students’ professional practice. The assessment of this segment will culminate in a progression viva, at which a recommendation for progression to the research phase will be made for the GSBOS to consider.

Students who fail to complete the taught elements successfully, or who progress to the research segment but later withdraw from or fail their research, will be eligible for one of the alternative awards from the taught programme. A named PgC would be approved at validation and awarded for successful completion of any 60 credits within the 180, for example (for a DMus) a PgC in Music Research; a PgD in Music Research for a defined 120 credits; and an MA in Music Research for completing all 180 credits. Level 7 exit awards are graded fail/pass/merit/distinction.

Central to these programmes is the requirement that students’ research be focussed upon the development of professional practice. Candidates must therefore normally have direct access to the world of work, and also preferably be employed in their chosen profession (the focus of their doctoral study) at enrolment. It follows that since most students will be in work, the programmes will usually be studied in part-time mode.

The normal University entry requirements for doctoral study (2i or above, IELTS 7.0 in English (normally all four aspects) for overseas candidates) 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 by demonstrating proven commitment to their profession. Thus, for such candidates, on merit, a 2ii would be an acceptable minimum.

Were students to leave the profession during their research, it may still prove possible to demonstrate that professional practice can be improved, and access to the appropriate data sets may still be available. The Graduate School Board of Study will determine whether withdrawal from the programme is necessary.

Each new professional doctorate programme is considered through a formal validation process by suitably-qualified members of the Validation and Audit Sub-Committee (VASC) Standing Panel. Validation confirms the overall programme structure and support arrangements and approves the taught level 7 modules. Following validation, final programme approval is by the GSBOS. Modification of the taught level 7 elements follows the same processes as for other Masters degrees, with minor modifications approved by Faculties and major modifications by the Academic Quality Enhancement Committee (AQEC) via the VASC Standing Panel.

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24 Access to the data set is the key matter that needs to be guaranteed.
25 For more information on the VASC Standing Panel including criteria for the selection of validation panels see QMH Chapter 8 and http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/aqdu/VASC_Standing_Panel/.
26 For a full description of programme modification processes including the distinction between major and minor modification see QMH Chapter 4.
27 See QMH Chapter 8.
Department/subject-level annual monitoring and periodic review processes enable oversight of the standards set and achieved for the taught elements while the GSBOS oversees overall programme quality and standards. AQEC reports periodically to the GSBOS to assure the Board that delegated functions for module monitoring, review and modification have been discharged appropriately. Professional doctorate programmes are approved for five years following which the GSBOS confers continuing approval based on student performance and other evidence from monitoring and review. The taught level 7 modules have individual five year approval and are reviewed and renewed using Faculty approval processes.

Professional doctorate programmes are managed within academic departments and faculties, and the assessment of modules28 is conducted within the department and faculty in accordance with the University’s Academic Regulations. The host faculty convenes the module assessment boards; the progression and award board for professional doctorates is the GSBOS.

An external examiner is appointed for each named Professional Doctorate programme and oversees the assessment of all contributing modules in accordance with the University’s procedures for the external examining of taught provision29.

An individual programme of research, drawing upon his or her professional practice, is required for each student. Supervisory arrangements for the research elements of Professional Doctorates are based upon those for a standard Edge Hill PhD, but with additional elements embedded to ensure appropriate consideration of the aspects of professional practice.

During the research element, the University’s standard PGR annual monitoring and appraisal processes will be used (see below).

Assessment of the professional doctorate is by dissertation and viva, managed in the same manner as for a PhD (see below).

There is no MPhil alternative award for students failing to successfully complete their professional doctorate.

Changes to Registration

Changes to mode of study30 will be dealt with as an administrative matter by the Graduate School Office and notified to the GSBOS. All other changes to registration are by application and subject to the approval of the Committee. These changes include:

i. Suspension of study
ii. Extension to the period of registration
iii. Change in award level

In order to be considered by the GSBOS, any request for a change to registration other than mode of study must be supported in writing by the supervisory team.

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28 With the exception of the research degree proposal, which is assessed by the Graduate School and the GSBOS.
29 See QMH Chapter 2.
30 For example, from part-time to full-time.
Suspension 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 a suspension of study; students are permitted, in extenuating circumstances, to suspend studies (intcalate) for a maximum period of twelve months in total across the entirety of their registration period. It is unusual for a student to be granted periods of suspension totalling more than twelve months during the registration although exceptions to this may be made by the GSBOS acting within its discretion. Approved periods of suspension will not be included in calculating the student’s period of registration for the purpose of determining minimum and maximum periods. Applications for suspension 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

Requests to extend the period of registration beyond the maximum period normally allowed will be considered by the GSBOS which will consider the request in the context of the progress made to date on the RDP, 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 12 month period and requests that extensions should take effect retrospectively will only be granted should the GSBOS 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.

Change in Award Level

Should a research student who has registered for the degree of PhD be unable to complete the requirements of the award or seek to exit before submission for PhD, s/he may apply for the registration to be remitted to that for MPhil. In such cases the GSBOS will satisfy itself, having regard to the transfer regulations outlined above and the University’s requirements for the award of the relevant degree, that the standard of award applied for is appropriate and can be met.

Withdrawal of Registration for an Edge Hill University Research Degree

Where the Research Office becomes aware that a research student has withdrawn their registration for a research degree it will notify the supervisory team and the appropriate Head of Department/Area and PVC/Dean of Faculty.

Where a supervisory team becomes aware that a research student has withdrawn their registration for a research degree, it will notify the Research Office.

In either event, the GSBOS must be notified of any student who has withdrawn from their registration for an RDP.
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 his/her supervisory team, the GSBOS may formally take the initiative and terminate a registration.

**Annual Monitoring, Progress and Assessment**

The University operates an annual review system in relation to research degree registrations involving both the research student and the Director of Studies. Both are required to independently complete a proforma and provide a written report which are considered together by the final meeting of the GSBOS in each academic year. The documentation from the supervisory team includes a recommendation in relation to progression to the next academic session and, should it be evident to the GSBOS that a student is failing to make satisfactory progress or respond appropriately to feedback, the committee may terminate their registration under the *Research Degree Regulations*. 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.\(^31\)

**The Appointment of Examiners**

Examination teams are nominated by the supervisory team but are appointed by the GSBOS. The Director of Studies for a research student is responsible for submitting proposals for the examination team to a meeting of the GSBOS 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 registration documentation, an additional external examiner is required.

The examining team must collectively have experience of a minimum of two or more previous examinations of research students at the level of the award being examined and one external examiner must have previous examining experience at this level. 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 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 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

\(^{31}\) [https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/graduateschool/regulations/](https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/graduateschool/regulations/)
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 her or his RDP, 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 adviser, 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 acts to ensure that an external examiner is not appointed with such frequency that familiarity with the University might be considered prejudicial to objective judgement.

While it is not possible to require the same degree of independence of the internal examiner as it is of the external examiner, 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.

In addition, the GSBOS nominates an independent and suitably experienced member of staff to chair the viva and make confidential contemporaneous notes in relation to the process of the viva. These notes must be retained by the chair until the period for appeal has expired.

**Examination**

The examination of Edge Hill University’s research degrees involves two stages and a recommendation that a degree cannot be awarded until both have been completed. These stages are:

i. The submission and preliminary assessment of the thesis;

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

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, then the prior approval of the supervisors is required. In this case, 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. A student must be made aware of this before they submit a thesis prior to the expiry of the stipulated period of enrolment.

All theses 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.

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 GSBOS, through the Research Office, 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 Research Office. 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 taking place between the examiners about the thesis. This preliminary report should include a preliminary recommendation. Examiners are required not to consult with each other in the preparation of these preliminary reports. Once all the reports have been received by the relevant Faculty research office, the examiners are free to discuss with each other 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) and 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 to revise the thesis for re-examination. Where the preliminary recommendations from the external examiners are not in agreement, the viva chair 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 committee 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; or,

iv. To require the appointment of a new examining team.

In the event that the GSBOS requires that an additional external examiner or new examining team be appointed, an independent preliminary report(s) on the thesis must be prepared and, where
necessary, a further oral examination (or approved alternative) be conducted. The additional external examiner, or examining team, is not informed of the opinions or recommendations of the original examiners.

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 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.

Examiners are required to complete preliminary report forms as detailed above. The form of re-examination will, however, depend on the outcome of the first examination and the requirements laid on the student with respect to the form of re-submission. This means, for example, that the examination team may have been content with the student’s performance in the viva but required them to make revisions to the thesis. In this event, the examination team may decide that a further oral examination is unnecessary. Equally, however, the examination team may decide at its discretion that an additional oral examination is required.

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 which a candidate takes to reach the examination for a PhD, but does not in any way imply different learning outcomes.

The distinctiveness of the route is that the thesis/dissertation comprises a coherent portfolio of both the candidate’s 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, in exactly the same manner as for candidates who have submitted a single dissertation.

The defining feature of this route to PhD is that the prospective candidate has already conducted research, and the outcomes have been made available in the public domain. The University takes a view on the appropriateness of the prospective candidate’s publications using a staged approach:

Stage 1: Establishing the prima facie case;
Stage 2: Production of a analytical commentary and portfolio; and
Stage 3: Assessment by Viva

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32 Restricted to current and previous members of staff of the University.
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 GSBOS 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 capping paper and portfolio of work marks the point at which candidature is formally recognised by the GSBOS, with the appointment of the final PhD viva panel. The candidate is not considered to be a student of the University since 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 Director of the Research Office and Assistant Director for Postgraduate Research offer informal support to prospective candidates and, where appropriate, faculties will provide discipline-specific advice during the first two stages.

Assessment is conducted in accordance with the University’s normal regulations for PhDs. The only notable difference is that since 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, and 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.

All PGR researchers 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.

Academic Review and Appeals

The University is committed to transparency and fairness in its dealing with students at all levels of study and has a system for hearing appeals against decisions of progression and examination panels. These are laid out in detail in the Research Degree Regulations.

Of particular note is the fact that, under these 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

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33 These codes available for download from [http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/research/research-ethics-governance/](http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/research/research-ethics-governance/).
automatically be reviewed for process and procedure by the GSBOS Quality Group. The University regards this to be a matter of good practice.

Complaints

Should a research degree student remain dissatisfied following the outcome of an appeal under the Research Degree Regulations they have a final right of appeal to the Vice-Chancellor, and subsequently to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA)\(^\text{34}\).