MANCHESTER 1824
The University of Manchester

Examination of Master of Science (MSc by Research) Degrees Policy

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1. Introduction and Purpose

1.1. This policy sets out the minimum requirements and expected standards for postgraduate research students (PGRs), examiners, and University of Manchester staff involved in the first examination of Master of Science (MSc by Research) degrees.

2. Scope and definitions

2.1 This policy is applicable to examiners, University of Manchester staff and all full-time and part-time PGRs on Master of Science (MSc by Research) Policy Ddegree programmes.

2.2 A separate policy exists for the examination of the Doctoral Degrees (including Professional Doctorates) Master of Philosophy (MPhil) degrees.

2.3 This policy is applicable to first submissions only. A separate policy exists for the resubmission and re-examination of all postgraduate research degrees.

2.4 Any deviation from this policy will only be considered in the most exceptional circumstances and prior approval / PGR agreement is required before the examination takes place.[1]

2.5 This document should be referred to along with the relevant degree Ordinances and Regulations and policies that comprise the Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Degrees.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

3.1 It is the responsibility of examiners, University of Manchester staff and PGRs as defined in 2.1 to adhere to this policy.

4. General Principles

4.1 It is a requirement of the University that candidates for the degree MSc by Research, who have progressed satisfactorily from the taught element of the degree, to produce a dissertation or other

[1] Enquiries regarding any deviation from policy should initially be directed to the appropriate PGR Office, and then to the Faculty Associate Dean for Postgraduate Research where appropriate. If necessary, cases may be referred on to the Associate Vice-President for Postgraduate Research and / or the Postgraduate Researchers Management Group (PRMG) via the Research Degrees and Researcher Development Team.

appropriate form of submitted material which embodies their research for examination at the end of the degree. In what follows the term 'dissertation' includes other forms of submitted material except where stated.

4.2 The dissertation is normally examined by one internal and one external examiner.

4.3 Although not normally required, the examiners may request the candidate to attend an oral examination prior to formulating their final report and recommendation on the dissertation (see section 8). The terms oral examination and viva voce both refer to the method of examining MSc by Research degrees and are interchangeable. For the purposes of this policy, the term oral examination is used.

4.4 Where an oral examination is required please also refer to the oral examination process as described in the Oral Examination Procedure for Postgraduate Research Degrees.

4.5 Examiners are not permitted to fail or refer a dissertation on grounds that are not raised with the candidate in an oral examination.

4.6 Only one opportunity to resubmit for re-examination is permitted for MSc by Research degrees.

4.7 Where applicable, candidates must satisfy the oral requirement of the degree before they can receive the final award.

5. Procedures Prior to MSc Examination - Notice of Submission

5.1 MSc by Research degree candidates must complete a Notice of Submission Form, available electronically in the University's progression monitoring system, giving at least six weeks up to a maximum of six months' notice of their intention to submit their dissertation to enable preparations for the oral examination to be made by the appropriate examiners.

5.2 Candidates should seek the advice of their supervisor/s on when to give notice. The supervisor/s opinion is advisory and the decision on when to submit lies with the candidate. The agreement of the supervisor to the submission of a dissertation does not guarantee the award of the degree.

5.3 Where the supervisor/s advise a candidate against submitting their dissertation, it is recommended that they note their concerns and reasons for their concerns with the relevant Faculty Doctoral Academy.

5.4 On submission of the completed Notice of Submission Form, the candidate's main supervisor will ensure that examiners are nominated in accordance with the criteria stipulated in the University's Nomination of Examiners & Independent Chairs for Postgraduate Research Degree Examinations Procedure.

6. Procedures Prior to Msc Examination – Dissertation Submission

6.1 The dissertation must be presented in accordance with the instructions set out in the University's Presentation of Dissertations Policy.

6.2 The dissertation must be submitted electronically in Portable Document Format (PDF) to the online institutional repository (where a programme is exempt from this requirement it will be stated in the Faculty/School Programme guidelines).

6.3 The appropriate Faculty Doctoral Academy will arrange for the dissertation to be forwarded to each examiner for assessment (under no circumstances should the candidate or supervisor supply the examiners with copies) alongside copies of the following documents accompanied by a covering letter containing instructions for completing and returning forms:

i. Pre-Oral Examination Report Form. To be completed by each examiner where they have agreed that an oral examination is required.[2]
ii. Examiners' Report Form.
iii. Examination of Master of Science (MSc by Research) Degrees Policy.
iv. Oral Examination Procedure for Postgraduate Research Degrees.
v. Fee and Expenses claim form (external examiners only).

7. The Msc by Research Timeframe

7.1 Examiners should not normally take longer than twelve working weeks to read and assess the dissertation and write their dissertation examination reports.

7.2 If the dissertation submitted for examination has been poorly written or presented and the examiners request an oral examination be held, examiners are not permitted to return the dissertation to the candidate for amendment prior to the oral examination.

7.3 If an examiner is unable to carry out their duties an alternative examiner should be considered. The candidate should be informed of any change to the examiner or any delay in appointing a suitable examiner at the earliest possible time.

7.4 Examiners who suspect the candidate has committed academic malpractice should contact the appropriate Faculty Doctoral Academy in the first instance to seek advice.

8. The MSc by Research Oral Examination

8.1 Full procedural details relating to all aspects of the oral examination (if required) can be found in the Oral Examination Procedure for Postgraduate Research Degrees.

9. The Examiner's Report Form

9.1 Examiners must each complete the Examiners' Report Form after reading the dissertation and before discussing the dissertation with each other.

[2] Examiners may also choose to use this form during their initial review of the dissertation in order to help when deciding if an oral examination is required.

9.2 The examiners must agree upon a final joint recommendation on the outcome of the examination. It is essential that examiners refer to this policy when completing the report form.

9.3 Examiners' responses provided on the form must be typed. If this is not possible, responses must be written clearly and legibly. The report provides important feedback to the candidate on their dissertation and it is essential that responses are detailed, clear and legible.

9.4 All reports must be completed as fully as possible and signed by both/all examiners before they are returned to the appropriate Faculty Doctoral Academy.

9.5 Examiners who are unable to agree on a recommendation must submit separate reports (see section 11).

9.6 The University issues two distinct versions of the report form for MSc by Research examination, one for first submission and one for re-submission, and examiners must ensure that they are using the correct version.

9.7 The completed Examiners' Report Form must be returned to the appropriate Faculty Doctoral Academy within eight weeks (four weeks for the MEnt) of the dissertation first being sent to the examiners.

10. Recommendations for the Degree

There are three categories of recommendations for MSc by Research: 'A' (award), 'B' (refer) and 'C' (reject). Within A category, there are two sub-categories. For both A sub-categories, examiners are also required to recommend a grade for the dissertation, as follows.

CATEGORY A: AWARD

10.1 Award with no corrections - recommendation A(i)

The examiners should select the recommendation A(i) if the dissertation is satisfactory in every way (listed below), there are no corrections to be made to it.

Recommendation A(ii) should be selected if some minor corrections are necessary to the dissertation, as detailed in section 12.1.2.

The examiners may recommend A(i) if they are satisfied that the dissertation is satisfactory in every way and that:

i. the candidate possesses an appropriate knowledge of the particular field of learning within which the subject of the dissertation falls;

ii. the results of the research show evidence of the capacity of the candidate to pursue research and scholarship and represent original work;

iii. the dissertation is presented in a lucid and scholarly manner;

iv. the dissertation has been submitted in the form prescribed by University regulations and policy;
v. no part of the dissertation has previously been submitted for the award of a degree at this or any other University;
vi. the dissertation and the work reported in it are the candidate's own.

10.2 Award subject to minor corrections - recommendation A(ii)

Recommendation A(ii) should be selected if the examiners are satisfied the dissertation meets the criteria for the degree but some minor corrections are necessary to the dissertation. The corrections, in the view of the examiners, and taking into account the guidance given below, should not be sufficiently serious to merit a recommendation for re-submission and re-examination under Category B.

Minor corrections permissible under A(ii) include:

i. typographical errors; however, if the errors , although trivial individually, are so numerous as to suggest carelessness on the part of the candidate or so intrusive as to distract the reader's attention from the argument of the dissertation, the examiners would be fully justified in making a recommendation under Category B rather than A (ii);
ii. minor amendments and/or replacement of, or additions to, the text or to references or diagrams;
iii. other more extensive corrections may be made as long as they do not require significant (as defined by the examiners) re-working or re-interpretation of the intellectual content of the dissertation.

If more substantial corrections are required, the examiners should make Category B recommendation.

The required corrections must be provided by examiners on section 4 of the Examiners' Report Form (MSc by Research for the benefit of the candidate. For recommendation A(ii), the corrections, once carried out by the candidate, must be approved by the internal examiner.

The time permitted for minor corrections (A(ii)) to be completed by the candidate is normally no more than four weeks, from the date the candidate receives the list of corrections from the appropriate School, or Faculty graduate office or Manchester Enterprise Centre. In exceptional circumstances, where there are more than four weeks of work required the candidate may be given 12 weeks to complete the corrections. The examiners' decision to allow 12 weeks for minor corrections to be completed, must be based on the quantity of the work required and length of time of which it is feasible to complete the corrections.

The relevant Faculty Doctoral Academy must receive notification, that the minor corrections have been approved by the internal examiner within 2 weeks of the candidate submitting the corrections.

The examiners' decision to recommend A(ii) should be made on the grounds that the dissertation will NOT require a further examination. The decision whether to recommend an A(ii) as opposed to B should not be determined by the candidate's personal circumstances and whether they will be able to correct the dissertation within the four-week timeframe.

The candidate is expected to be available in the period after the examination to complete minor corrections as part of their responsibilities in the examination of their degree. In very exceptional circumstances, the candidate may apply to the appropriate Faculty Doctoral Academy for permission to submit the corrected dissertation later than within the four-week timeframe. Candidates and examiners should refer to the appropriate Faculty Doctoral Academy if further guidance on minor corrections is required.

10.3 MSc by Research Degree Grades (Distinction, Merit, Pass).

For both recommendations A(i) and A(ii), the examiners are required to indicate whether the dissertation should be awarded the following grade:

i. Distinction;
ii. Merit;
iii. Pass.

If the dissertation is of sufficient quality, both in presentation and research content, the examiners may recommend the award of Distinction or Merit.

The following table provides guidance on the criteria for awarding pass, merit, or distinction to MSc by Research dissertations. Examiners should decide on which grade to recommend independently based on the average or predominant grade over the various categories.

The conferral of a Merit or Distinction grade for the final award is contingent upon the postgraduate researcher attaining the requisite average mark in the taught components of the programme—specifically, an average of 60% or higher for a Merit, or 70% or higher for a Distinction—with no individual unit mark falling below 50% or classified as a Fail, in accordance with the MSc by Research Degree Regulations.

The final degree award will be decided by the appropriate postgraduate degrees panel, taking into consideration of both the examiners' recommendation and the performance of the candidate in the examinations of the taught component (as defined in the MSc by Research degree regulations).

	Pass (below 60%)	**Merit** (60% or more)	**Distinction** (70% or more)
Work completed, extent of results	Expected level for an MSc by Research postgraduate working for eight months	Somewhat above expected level for an MSc by Research post- graduate working for eight months	Equivalent to the work done by an advanced PhD level postgraduate in eight months
Publication potential	Could be a contribution to a paper, with changes	Could be a paper, with some additional research and re-writing	Could be published as a first-author paper with relatively minor changes
Contribution of candidate	Candidate has learned techniques and worked to produce results under instruction	Candidate shows some level of independent development of computational or theoretical methods or experimental techniques	Significant evidence for in-dependent contribution of candidate to theoretical, computational or experimental work at a level expected in a PhD thesis
Knowledge of field	Candidate is aware of basic papers/work in the field and able to motivate the research done at an acceptable level	Candidate has a good awareness of previous research in the field, with few omissions and correct facts throughout	Candidate has a full grasp of the field, and is able to give a professional-level review with no omissions or misunderstandings as would be expected in a PhD thesis
Presentation quality	Adequate figures and tables, significant number of minor errors, scientific writing style is acceptable with some lapses	Good scientific writing style, well-organised content	Few if any typographical syntax errors; fluent scientific writing style; good figures/tables with informative captions; well-organised content at a level expected in a PhD thesis

10.4 CATEGORY B: REFER FOR RE-EXAMINATION

Referral under recommendation B requires the candidate to resubmit the dissertation for re-examination. A candidate will be permitted to resubmit on only one occasion. See the University's Resubmission and Re-examination of Postgraduate Research Degrees Policy for details of resubmission and re-examination.

Examiners are required to make category B recommendations when the dissertation is unsatisfactory and requires a further examination.

For category B recommendations, examiners must submit a statement detailing the required corrections. Examiners should offer guidance to the candidate when their recommended changes will impact on the word limit of the dissertation; this may include suggestions on which parts of the dissertation can be reduced to allow for any additions.

The candidate is normally required to revise and resubmit the dissertation for the Masters degree within four months of receiving the examiners' statement detailing the required corrections from the appropriate Faculty Doctoral Academy.

Any PGR who wishes to request an extension to their resubmission deadline, due to mitigating circumstances, should make the request via the normal extension application process within the School.

10.5 CATEGORY C: REJECT

Where examiners are not satisfied that the dissertation have met the standards required, and have not found evidence that the dissertation could be corrected under category A or B, they may recommend category C; reject.

For recommendation C, examiners must justify their decision not to recommend the MSc by Research in the Examiners' Report Form. When the recommendation of the examiners is not to make an award, the internal examiner(s) will normally be invited to the next meeting of the appropriate School or Faculty postgraduate research degrees panel or Manchester Enterprise Centre examiners' meeting to assist in its consideration of the case and to answer any questions.

11. Examiner Disagreement over a Recommendation

11.1 If, after their deliberations, examiners remain unable to reach an agreement on a recommendation, the procedure detailed below must be followed.

i. Each examiner must complete a separate Examiners' Report Form (MSc by Research) giving justification for their recommendation. The forms should be submitted to the appropriate Faculty Doctoral Academy.

ii. The internal examiner/s will be invited to the next meeting of the appropriate postgraduate research degrees panel to discuss the reports and to see if a recommendation can be agreed. Before the meeting, the external examiner should be contacted in order to obtain his/her views on the case.

iii. If agreement is not reached, the appropriate postgraduate research degrees panel may, at its discretion, appoint one or more new examiners or may determine other action where appropriate. Additional examiners must not be told the identity of the original examiners nor their specific recommendations.

11.2 Examiners may consult with staff in the appropriate Faculty Doctoral Academy in the first instance for further advice if necessary. Faculty Doctoral Academy staff may refer any problems or concerns to the Faculty Associate Dean for Graduate Education.

12. Approval of Recommendations

12.1 The result recommended by examiners is provisional until approved by the appropriate postgraduate research degrees panel.

12.2 The decision to award a MSc by Research is made on the basis of the examiners' reports and recommendation, and the candidate's performance in the examinations of the taught component.

12.3 A postgraduate research degrees panel will normally consist of a chair who is a senior academic member of staff, senior academic staff from each School/discipline within that particular School/Faculty and PGR professional service staff.

12.4 An MSc by Research degree recommendation will be approved either at a meeting of the appropriate School or Faculty postgraduate research degrees panel or just by the chair of the panel (i.e. 'chairs action').

12.5 If a recommendation is straightforward and there are no issues of concern, a recommendation will normally be approved by chair's action, and reported to members at the next appropriate postgraduate research degrees panel.

12.6 The recommendation of category C (reject) will normally be considered at the next meeting of the appropriate postgraduate research degrees panel, where members will discuss individual cases and review examiners' reports. The internal examiner will normally be invited to attend this meeting and in some cases the supervisor(s) may be required to attend. It may also be appropriate to seek further comments, for clarity, from the external examiner.

13. Submission of Dissertation and Publication of Result

13.1 Once the examiners' report have been received and the recommendation has been approved either by chair's action or by the appropriate postgraduate research degrees panel, the appropriate Faculty Doctoral Academy is able to release the approved recommendation to the candidate.

13.2 In the case of an A(ii) recommendation (award with minor corrections), the appropriate Faculty Doctoral Academy must have received notification from the internal examiner that minor

corrections have been satisfactorily completed by the candidate before the final award can be confirmed.

13.3 Results will not be formally published until the candidate has submitted an electronic copy of their final dissertation to the online institutional repository.

13.4 Any delay in the submission of the the final dissertation will delay formal publication of the result (i.e. completion of the candidate's record on the student record system), which will in turn delay the release of the degree certificate and graduation.

13.5 A degree will not be conferred upon any person who has a relevant debt outstanding to the University. Candidates with debt outstanding to the University should contact the Student Services Centre in the first instance to arrange prompt payment.

14. Appeals

14.1 Appeals may be made only on specific grounds as detailed in the University's Academic Appeals Procedure.

14.2 If the external examiner has concerns relating to standards within the institution they should approach the internal examiner in the first instance. Once all internal procedures have been exhausted including a confidential report to the Vice-President (Teaching, Learning and Students), they have the right to contact the QAA.

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