



## Examination of Doctoral 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 doctoral degrees.

### 2. Scope and definitions

- 2.1 This policy is applicable to University of Manchester staff, external examiners and all full-time / part-time PGRs on Doctor of Philosophy (PhD); Doctor of Medicine (MD) Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) and Professional, Engineering and Enterprise programmes.
- 2.2 A separate policy exists for the first examination of the degrees of [Master of Philosophy \(MPhil\)](#) and [Master of Science \(MSc by Research\)](#) and [Master of Enterprise \(MEnt\)](#).
- 2.3 This policy does not apply to [PhD by Published Work](#) or [Higher Doctorates](#).
- 2.4 This policy is applicable to first submissions only. A [separate policy](#) exists for the resubmission and re-examination of all postgraduate research degrees.
- 2.5 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.<sup>1</sup>
- 2.6 This document should be referred to along with the relevant degree Ordinances and Regulations and other policies that comprise the [Code of Practice](#) for Postgraduate Research Degrees.

### 3. Roles and Responsibilities

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

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<sup>1</sup> 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](#).

#### **4. Doctoral Degree Examinations – General Principles**

- 4.1 It is a requirement of the University that candidates for all doctoral degrees produce a thesis (or other appropriate form of submitted material) which embodies their research for examination at the end of the degree. In what follows the term 'thesis' includes other forms of submitted material except where stated.
- 4.2 The examination of a doctoral degree thesis normally involves two parts: firstly, the submission and preliminary assessment of the thesis, normally by one internal and one external examiner; and secondly, the defence of the thesis by the candidate at an oral examination with the same examiners.
- 4.3 Examiners must not normally take longer than twelve working weeks to read and assess the thesis and write their pre-oral examination reports. The oral examination must take place without undue delay (normally within twelve working weeks of the thesis being sent to the examiner).
- 4.4 Oral examinations are mandatory for all doctoral degree candidates submitting for the first time, even when the examiners are entirely satisfied with the thesis content and its quality.
- 4.5 The terms oral examination and viva voce both refer to the method of examining doctoral degrees and are interchangeable. For the purposes of this policy, the term oral examination is used.
- 4.6 Examiners are not permitted to fail or refer a thesis on grounds that are not raised with the candidate in the oral examination.
- 4.7 Only one opportunity to resubmit for re-examination is permitted for doctoral degrees.
- 4.8 In addition to an oral examination, candidates may be required by the examiners to undertake a written examination or presentation which may, for example, test or examine the candidate's competence in the subject. The candidate may only be examined upon material that is formally required for the degree for which they are being examined.
- 4.9 Candidates must satisfy the oral requirement of the doctoral degree before they can receive the final award.
- 4.10 Candidates must satisfactorily complete any additional taught, practical or placement requirements, as defined by their programme, to the specified standard in order to receive the final award.

#### **5. Procedures Prior to Doctoral Examination - Notice of Submission**

- 5.1 Doctoral 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 thesis to enable preparations for the oral examination to be made.

- 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 thesis does not guarantee the award of the degree.
- 5.3 Where the supervisor/s advise a candidate against submitting their thesis, it is recommended that they note their concerns and reasoning with the relevant PGR Office.
- 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 Policy](#).

## 6. Procedures Prior to Doctoral Examination – Thesis Submission

- 6.1 Theses must be presented in accordance with the instructions set out in the University's [Presentation of Theses Policy](#).
- 6.2 The thesis 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 PGR office will arrange for the electronic thesis to be forwarded to each examiner for assessment (under no circumstances should the candidate or supervisor/s 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 before the oral examination.
  - ii. Examiners' Report Form. To be completed jointly by both examiners after the oral examination.
  - iii. Examination of Doctoral Degrees Policy.
  - iv. Oral Examination Procedure for Postgraduate Research Degrees.
  - v. Fees and Expenses claim form (external examiners only).
- 6.4 If an examiner is unable to carry out their duties an alternative examiner should be appointed. The candidate should be informed of any change to the examiner or any delay in appointing a suitable examiner at the earliest possible time.
- 6.5 If the thesis submitted for examination has been poorly written or presented, examiners are not permitted to return the thesis to the candidate for amendment prior to the oral examination.
- 6.6 If the thesis is submitted at the end of the candidate's registration period and registration subsequently expires, candidates will be able to get normal access to library and computer facilities until withdrawal or at the end of their graduation month following degree completion.
- 6.7 If a candidate has any issues with access to facilities, they must contact the appropriate PGR office who will arrange access.

## 7. Criteria for Awarding Doctoral Degrees

- 7.1 Examiners are required to refer to the criteria for the individual degree detailed in the [degree ordinances](#) before beginning the examination process. Examiners must be satisfied that the degree criteria have been met before recommending an award.
- 7.2 For minimum / maximum theses lengths please refer to the individual programme guidelines. If a candidate wishes to submit a thesis which exceeds the standard word count an application must be submitted to the appropriate PGR office. Further information can be found in the [Presentation of Theses Policy](#).

## 8. The Doctoral Oral Examination

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

## 9. Joint Examiners' Report Form

- 9.1 After the oral examination, the examiners must agree upon a final joint report to be written on the Joint Examiners' Report Form giving their recommendation on the outcome of the examination and their comments on the thesis and candidate's performance at the oral examination. It is essential that examiners refer to this policy when completing the report form.
- 9.2 Examiners' responses provided on the form must be typed. The joint report provides important feedback to the candidate on their thesis and their performance at the oral examination and it is essential that responses are detailed, clear and legible. Where possible the candidate should be informed of the provisional outcome of the examination within 5 working days of the oral examination. However, where a recommendation is yet to be agreed an early communication may be to inform the candidate that the examiners require more time to discuss the final recommendation.
- 9.3 Forms are sent directly to the external examiners by the appropriate PGR Office. All joint reports must be completed as fully as possible and signed by all examiners and, where applicable, the independent chair before they are uploaded to the University's progression monitoring system via the internal examiner or independent chair.
- 9.4 In exceptional circumstances, examiners may submit separate reports with the permission of the appropriate PGR Office. Examiners who are unable to agree on a recommendation must submit separate reports (see section 10).
- 9.5 The University issues two distinct versions of the joint report form, one for first submission and one for resubmission, and examiners must ensure they are using the correct version. The Examiners' Report Form is sent, together with the Pre-Oral Examination Form and other documents, from the appropriate PGR Office when the thesis is first sent to the examiners.

- 9.6 The completed Joint Examiners' Report Form must be uploaded to the University's progression monitoring system by the internal examiner (or the independent chair) within five working days of the oral examination, regardless of which recommendation the examiners have made. This requirement must be made clear to both the internal and external examiners before the examination process begins. If examiners require more than five working days to complete the form, they must inform the appropriate PGR Office after the oral examination.
- 9.7 Candidates can see examiner reports (i.e. the Pre-Oral Examination Report Form and the Joint Examiners' Report Form) once the recommendation has been approved by the appropriate School or Faculty postgraduate research degrees committee.
- 9.8 Candidates must address all of the recommendations stated within the report.
- 9.9 If a candidate wishes to appeal the contents of the report they can only do so if they have proper grounds as detailed in the [University's Academic Appeals](#) Procedure.

## 10. Examiner Disagreement

- 10.1 If, after the oral examination and their deliberations, examiners are unable to reach an agreement on a recommendation, the procedure detailed below must be followed.
- 10.2 Each examiner must complete a separate Examiners' Report Form giving justification for their recommendation. The forms should be uploaded to the University's progression monitoring system via the internal examiner (or the independent chair) within five working days of the oral examination.
- 10.3 The internal examiner or independent chair where appropriate, will be invited to the next, or specially convened, meeting of the appropriate School or Faculty postgraduate research degrees committee 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 their views on the case. If necessary, the chair of the appropriate School or Faculty postgraduate research degrees committee may seek advice on the case from the Faculty Associate Dean for Postgraduate Research or the Associate Vice-President for Postgraduate Research.
- 10.4 If agreement is not reached, the appropriate School or Faculty postgraduate research degrees committee may, at its discretion, appoint a new external examiner (or examiners) or may determine other action where appropriate. Additional examiners must not be told the identity of the original examiners nor their specific recommendations.
- 10.5 Examiners may consult with staff in the appropriate PGR Office on the day of the oral examination for further advice. PGR staff may refer any problems or concerns to the Faculty Associate Dean for Postgraduate Research.

## 11. Examiner Recommendations for Doctoral Degrees (first examination)

There are three categories of recommendations for doctoral degrees: 'A' (award), 'B' (refer) and 'C' (reject). Within each category, examiners must select a sub-recommendation, as follows:

### **11.1 CATEGORY A: Award (recommendation A(i) and A(ii))**

#### **i. Award with no corrections (recommendation A(i))**

The examiners should select recommendation A(i) if the thesis is satisfactory in every way and there are no corrections to be made to it and that:

- the candidate possesses an appropriate knowledge of the particular field of learning within which the subject of the thesis falls;
- the research which is reported in the thesis contributes a substantial addition to knowledge;
- the results of the research show evidence of originality and independent critical judgement;
- the thesis is presented in a lucid and scholarly manner;
- the thesis has been submitted in the form prescribed by University regulations and policy;
- any contribution of others has been clearly detailed;
- no part of the thesis has previously been submitted for the award of a degree at this or any other University;
- the thesis and the work reported in it are the candidate's own.

Following receipt of an A(i) award recommendation the final version of the thesis should be submitted by the PGR, normally within 10 working days.

#### **ii. Award subject to minor corrections (recommendation A(ii))**

Recommendation A(ii) should be selected if the examiners are satisfied that the thesis meets the criteria for the degree but some minor corrections are necessary to the thesis. 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 resubmission and re-examination under Category B. Minor corrections permissible under box A(ii) include:

- 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 thesis, the examiners would be fully justified in making a recommendation under Category B rather than box A(ii);
- minor amendments and/or replacement of, or additions to, the text or to references or diagrams;
- 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 thesis.

If more substantial revisions are required, the examiners should select one of the recommendations under Category B.

A list of corrections must be provided by the examiners in section four of the Examiners' Report Form for the benefit of the candidate. Once carried out by the candidate, the corrections must be approved by the internal examiner without the need for a further oral examination.

The time permitted for minor corrections to be completed by the candidate is **normally no more than four weeks** from the date the candidate receives the list of corrections in the University's progression monitoring system. In exceptional circumstances, where there are more than four weeks of work 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 PGR Office must receive notification that the minor corrections have been approved by the internal examiner via the University's progression monitoring system within 2 weeks of the candidate submitting the corrections.

In examinations where there is no internal examiner, the independent chair must ensure that minor corrections are approved and confirmed in the University's progression monitoring system by an external examiner or other person nominated by the School.

The examiners' decision to recommend an A(ii) should be made on the grounds that the thesis will NOT require a further examination. The decision whether to recommend an A(ii) as opposed to a B(i) **must not be determined by the candidate's personal circumstances.**

The candidate is expected to be available in the period after the oral examination to complete minor revisions as part of their responsibilities in the examination of their degree. In very exceptional circumstances, the candidate may apply to the appropriate PGR Office for permission to submit the corrected thesis later than the four-week or 12 week deadline given.

Candidates and examiners should refer to the appropriate PGR Office if further guidance on minor corrections is required.

## **11.2 CATEGORY B: REFER FOR RE-EXAMINATION (recommendations B(i), B(ii) and B(iii))**

Referral under recommendation B requires the candidate to resubmit the thesis 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 full details.

Examiners are required to make one of the following recommendations under category B:

- i. B (i) that the thesis is satisfactory in substance, but defective in presentation and/or content and does not require a further oral examination;
- ii. B (ii) that the thesis is satisfactory in substance, but defective in presentation and/or content and requires a further oral examination;
- iii. B (iii) that the thesis is unsatisfactory in substance, defective in presentation and/or content and requires further research and a further oral examination.

If examiners recommend that the candidate will require a further oral examination upon resubmission of the thesis (recommendations B(ii) and B(iii)), the examiners may later, if in joint agreement and if their recommendation is to award the degree, dispense with the oral examination after assessment of the resubmitted thesis. Examiners must inform the appropriate PGR Office as soon as possible if they wish to dispense with the oral examination so that the candidate can be informed.

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

For recommendations **B(i) and B(ii)**, the candidate is normally required to revise and resubmit the thesis for the doctoral degree **within six months** of receiving the examiners' statement detailing the required revisions (see section 12). Examiners may make a recommendation to extend that period so that the candidate is required to revise and resubmit the thesis for the doctoral degree within 12 months of receiving the examiners' statement detailing the required revisions from the appropriate PGR Office. The decision to exceptionally allow additional time for the candidate to revise and resubmit is made by the appropriate committee and must be based on the quantity of the work required and length of time it is feasible to complete the work.

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](#).



For recommendation **B(iii)**, the candidate is required to revise and resubmit the thesis for the doctoral degree **within 12 months** of receiving the examiners' statement detailing the required revisions (see section 12) from the appropriate PGR Office.

### **11.3 CATEGORY C: REJECT (recommendations C(i), C(ii), C(iii) and C(iv))**

Where examiners are not satisfied that the thesis and oral examination have met the standards required, and have not found evidence that the thesis could be corrected under category A or B, they may recommend:

**i. C(i): Reject but award the degree of Master of Philosophy (MPhil).**

For recommendation C(i), examiners must refer to the degree criteria in the MPhil Ordinances and Regulations and justify their decision to recommend the award of MPhil. The candidate must resubmit the thesis via the online repository, with a new title page, indicating that it is a master's (and not a doctoral) thesis.

**ii. C(ii): reject but award the degree of Master of Philosophy (MPhil) subject to minor corrections being made to the thesis.**

For recommendation C(ii), as part of the Examiners' Report Form examiners must include a statement detailing the required corrections (see section 12) . Examiners must refer to the degree criteria in the MPhil Ordinances and Regulations and justify their decision to recommend the award of MPhil, subject to minor corrections.

The time permitted for minor corrections to be completed by the candidate is normally no more than four weeks from the date the candidate receives the list of corrections in the University's progression monitoring system. In exceptional circumstances, where there are more than four weeks of work required the candidate may be given 12 weeks to complete the revisions. 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.

On completion and approval of minor corrections, the candidate must upload the thesis via MyManchester, with a new title page, indicating that it is a master's (and not a doctoral) thesis.

**iii. C(iii): reject but invite the candidate to revise and resubmit the thesis for examination for the degree of Master of Philosophy (MPhil).**

For recommendation C(iii), examiners must submit a statement detailing the required revisions (see section 12) as part of the Examiners' Report Form. The candidate is required to revise and resubmit the thesis for examination for the MPhil degree within six months of receiving the examiners' statement via the University's progression monitoring system detailing the required revisions, and, where appropriate, attend one further oral examination. The candidate will be permitted to resubmit on only one occasion.

**iv. C(iv): reject and no resubmission be permitted.**

For recommendation C(iv), examiners must justify their decision not to recommend the doctorate or MPhil in the Examiners' Report Form.

When the recommendation of the examiners is not to award a doctoral degree, the internal examiner or independent chair where appropriate will normally be invited to the next meeting of the appropriate School or Faculty postgraduate research degrees committee to assist in its consideration of the case and to answer any questions.

## **12. Examiners' statement (applicable to category B, C(ii) and C(iii) recommendations only)**

- 12.1 Where examiners recommend any of the category B recommendations or the category C recommendations C(ii) or C(iii), examiners must produce a written statement of required revisions. This will then be provided to the candidate via the University's progression monitoring system. Examiners should give sufficient detail of the defects of the original submission and recommend ways in which the thesis should be corrected in order to make a satisfactory revision of the thesis. The statement must be suitable to form the basis of the subsequent re-examination.
- 12.2 The statement should specify to the candidate changes that need to be made to the thesis before resubmission, although the statement does not need to descend to the level of specifying every revision to spelling, grammar, etc., where these are numerous, and can state requirements in general terms, where appropriate. The statement should be in a form suitable for communication to the candidate.
- 12.3 The examiners must agree this statement of required revision and ensure it is included as part of the joint examiners report, within five working days of the examination. The candidate can view the report in the University's progression monitoring system with the official written notice of the recommendation once it has been confirmed by the appropriate School or Faculty postgraduate research degrees committee

## **13. Approval / Ratification of Recommendations**

- 13.1 The result recommended by examiners is provisional until approved / ratified by the appropriate School or Faculty postgraduate research degrees committee. The decision to award a doctoral

degree is made on the basis of the examiners' reports and recommendation. A School or Faculty postgraduate research degrees committee 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 office staff.

- 13.2 A doctoral degree recommendation will be approved / ratified either at a meeting of the appropriate School or Faculty postgraduate research degrees committee or by the chair of the committee (i.e. 'chair's action'). If a recommendation is straightforward and there are no issues of concern, a recommendation will normally be approved / ratified by chair's action, and reported to members at the next appropriate School or Faculty postgraduate research degrees committee meeting.
- 13.3 The recommendations of category B (iii) (referral with further research and a further oral) and categories C(i)-C(iv) (reject), will normally be considered at the next meeting of the appropriate School or Faculty postgraduate research degrees committee, where members will discuss individual cases and review examiners' reports. The internal examiner, or independent chair where appropriate, will normally be invited to attend this meeting and in some cases the supervisor may be required to attend. It may also be appropriate to seek further comments, for clarity, from the external examiner. As part of the discussions the research degrees committee can request revised examiners reports, review statements on revisions and/or request an amendment to the recommendation with agreement from the examiner.

#### **14. Final Thesis Submission and Publication of the Result**

- 14.1 Once the examiners' reports have been received and the recommendation has been approved / ratified either by chair's action or by the appropriate School or Faculty postgraduate research degrees committee, the appropriate PGR Office is able to release the approved / ratified award recommendation to the candidate.
- 14.2 In the case of an A(ii) recommendation (award with minor corrections), the internal examiner must sign off in the University's progression monitoring system that minor revisions have been satisfactorily completed by the candidate.
- 14.3 Results will not be formally published until the candidate has submitted an electronic copy of their final thesis with the completed appropriate revisions.
- 14.4 Any delay in the submission of the electronic copy of the final thesis will delay formal publication of the result (i.e. completion of the candidate's record on the student system), which will in turn delay the release of the degree certificate and graduation.
- 14.5 The School or Faculty should give consideration to parties who need to be notified of the result such as the PGR's sponsor. 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.

- 14.6 In all cases the official degree award date is the date that the Examiners' recommendation was approved / ratified (see section 13). The official degree award date will be included on the degree certificate.

## 15. Appeals

- 15.1 Appeals may be made only on specific grounds as detailed in the [University's Academic Appeals Procedure](#).
- 15.2 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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