Research Student Assessment Handbook

Effective from November 2021 to present

Student Regulations and

Policies

uclan.ac.uk/studentcontract

This handbook should be read in conjunction with the Academic Regulations for Postgraduate Research Degrees and Professional Doctorates and the Assessment Handbook for Taught Programmes

Preface

This Handbook contains assessment policy and procedures for postgraduate research degree programmes that underpin and carry the same authority as the Academic Regulations for Postgraduate Research Degrees and applies to provision delivered in the UK or overseas. It should be read in conjunction with the Assessment Handbook for Taught Programmes.

Any reference in this Handbook to an office holder of the University (e.g. Dean/Head of School) includes a nominee acting on behalf of that office holder.

Contents

1. Assessments

1.1. Research Programme Approval

Research Programme Approval (RPA) is an assessment of progress and successful completion of the RPA process constitutes the first progression criterion for all research degree students.

The aim of this process is to approve the title of the research project and to ensure that:

a)   the candidate is demonstrating the appropriate research skills to undertake the research programme;

b)   the candidate is embarking on a viable research programme for the target award to a timescale that acknowledges the agreed standard completion time;

c)   the supervision is adequate and likely to be sustained;

d)   the research environment is suitable; and

e)   the ethical and governance issues have been addressed.

1.1.1. Timescales
Students for all awards (except the MD and PhD by Published Works) are expected to apply for Research Programme Approval within the timescales stated in A4.1.3 of the Academic Regulations. Two attempts at RPA will be allowed. If RPA is not successfully completed after two attempts, then the student will be withdrawn from their research degree programme.

1.1.2. Approval
Once the referee has recommended approval of the RPA, final approval is required by the allocated Research Degrees Tutor.

1.2. Annual Assessment of Progress

Every research student will undergo an annual assessment of their progress. The process is designed to ensure every student has made sufficient progress with their research to submit by the expected date, has undertaken the necessary skills training, is receiving regular supervision and has access to appropriate facilities to enable them to complete their degree successfully.

1.3. Progression criteria
In order to progress from one year to the next, students have to be satisfactorily enrolled and have paid the correct fees and complete the Annual Assessment of Progress Process. Individual progression criteria will be agreed year-on-year.

1.4. Progression recommendations
- Individual student recommendations for the current year are ratified at the Progression Board meeting.
- If the recommendation is 'Refer', a student will be required to complete remedial work and will then be considered by the Reassessment Board.

The available recommendations are:

PROGRESS TO NEXT ACADEMIC SESSION	Student is progressing satisfactorily. If progress is slow or is giving cause for concern, but not to such an extent that the student should be prevented from progressing, these concerns should be documented by the supervisors or RDT with advice on the work required the following year. If necessary, specific action and deadlines should be provided to ensure that the student remains on schedule.
CONTINUE TO MPhil ONLY	(PhD via MPhil students only). If a student has successfully transferred to PhD but is not making sufficient progress, progression to the next academic session can be allowed on the basis that the target award is changed to MPhil.
REFER	This recommendation is used if a student has not yet made enough progress to justify continuing into the next academic session or where remedial work is required to get the project back on course. This work will be carried out and will be reassessed. Students will be automatically referred if i) they have not completed 'Research Programme Approval' or Transfer to PhD by the published deadlines, or ii) not taken part or completed the Annual Assessment of Progress Exercise. Students will be required to complete these processes successfully before progression can be confirmed.
INTERRUPTION OF STUDY	This recommendation is used for students who i) are on an authorised interruption of study at the time of the AAP exercise, ii) have returned from an authorised interruption of study since the AAP exercise and an assessment of progress has not yet taken place, iii) are due to return from an authorised interruption of study before the start of their next year of study.
FAIL	This recommendation cannot normally be agreed until a student has been given an opportunity to complete remedial work. If progress is still unsatisfactory at the Reassessment Board, a fail recommendation will be agreed.

1.5. The Research Student Progress File

The Progress File is a record of individual activities and achievements throughout the research degree programme. It can be stored electronically (recommended) or on paper.

Every student should be updating their Progress File throughout their studies, including after completion of any activity, training event, presentation, seminar attended etc.

Supporting evidence should be stored with the Progress File. This may take the form of a certificate of attendance, a conference abstract booklet, the Research Programme Approval document, the transfer report, or personal notes of thoughts and reflections on learning and skills development etc.

The Progress File will be viewed by the Supervisory Team and Research Degrees Tutor (RDT) during the end-of-year Annual Assessment of Progression Process.

The Progress File and Annual Assessment of Progression forms can be found in the Research Document Library.

1.6. Transferring from MPhil to PhD

1.6.1. Aim of the Transfer Process
The aim of the transfer process is to establish whether the student has produced work of sufficient quantity and quality to suggest that PhD standard can be achieved. The main criterion for this is the ability to produce work that makes an original contribution to knowledge. There are three elements to transfer:

A: _Written Transfer Report from student_ *(approximately 3000 – 6000 words) containing an Abstract (approximately 400-500 words) and summarising the work so far, the intended further work, and detailing the original contribution to PhD level. At least 1500 words of the report should be devoted to contextualisation and the assessment of wider implications.*

B: _Written report from supervisors on progress made_ _(around 500 words_). *Supervisors are asked to comment on the approved programme of research, on the student's individual training programme, and the evidence for work at PhD standard.*

C: _Transfer Viva by a Panel_

1.6.2. The Transfer Viva
The Transfer Panel will usually consist of the Referee, the Director of Studies (or second supervisor) and the Research Degrees Tutor.

The Panel will be assessing whether the student has made sufficient progress in terms of quantity to complete the PhD within the registration period (full-time students are expected to submit after three years; part-time students after six years) but also whether the student understands and is able to articulate the expected element of originality in the work, including practice/performance elements.

1.6.3. Outcomes of the Transfer Viva
The Panel will decide whether the student has reached a quality threshold to be allowed to progress to PhD, or whether further work is required, and will make a recommendation to the Research Degrees Board.

If the Panel identifies **minor issues**, the Panel will decide whether or not these must be completed before Transfer can be recommended.

If the Panel identifies **major issues**, the student will be given an opportunity to reapply for Transfer and a new deadline will be set.

If the student is not successful, then they will required to progress to MPhil only.

2. Research Degree Examinations

Introduction

Submission of a thesis for examination is at the sole discretion of a student. However, candidates should ensure that they follow the advice of supervisors when deciding whether or not to submit. The thesis must be submitted no later than the candidate's lapse date (last day of registration).

For information regarding anonymisation, copyright, confidentiality, embargoes and intellectual property rights see Section 4.

2.1 Stages of the Examination Process

Examinations of research degrees normally consist of two parts:

- Submission and a preliminary assessment of the thesis and, where applicable, any practice-based materials submitted;
- An oral examination: this includes a defence of the thesis, the programme of work and the field of study in which the programme lies. For awards by Published Works or Portfolio, Part 1 is the submission of the Published Work/Portfolio and the synoptic commentary and preliminary assessment of the Published Work/Portfolio.

2.1.1 Examination Arrangements

- It is the responsibility of the Head of School to propose the examiners. However, it is likely in determining the examining team the Head of School will seek support from the supervisory team on locating suitable examiners.

2.1.2 Submission

Upon approval of examination arrangements, candidates must submit the thesis to the Academic Registry. The thesis should be formatted according to the published thesis submission guidelines.

2.1.3 After Submission

- An oral examination is normally expected to take place within approximately two months of submission.

2.1.4 The Oral Examination

Candidates may invite a supervisor to accompany them. The supervisor cannot participate in the defence and supervisor must withdraw prior to the examiners' deliberations on the outcome.

The University does not allow recording of any oral examinations by any party.

At the end of the examination the examiners may give candidates the opportunity to add any material points to the answers that have already provided.

2.1.5 After the Oral Examination

The official recommendation (and list of corrections/guidance notes if applicable) will be sent to the candidate by the Academic Registry.

2.1.6 Submission of revised theses

Candidates are strongly advised to contact their supervisors for support and guidance in

competing any revisions. They should not attempt to approach examiners directly regarding their revisions.

2.2 Candidates with Disabilities

Notification of special requirements should have been given at the time examination arrangements were approved. Candidates should discuss any potential requirement for reasonable adjustments during the oral examination with an Inclusivity Advisor and the Academic Registry at their earliest possible convenience.

2.3 Cancellation and failure to attend the Oral Examination

Cancellation of an oral examination

Occasionally, due to circumstances beyond the University's control, the oral examination will have to be cancelled. This may due to illness of the student or examiners. Where the candidate is requesting the cancellation then evidence of mitigating circumstances must be provided to the Academic Registry.

Failure to attend an oral examination

In the event a candidate fails to attend an oral examination, they will automatically be referred for second examination.

Where there are unforeseeable or unpreventable mitigating circumstances to be considered the candidate must provide evidence of these mitigating circumstances to the Academic Registry at the earliest possible opportunity.

2.4 Video Conferencing for Research Degree Examinations

The University expects the oral examination to be conducted in person on campus. However, oral examinations may be conducted online if requested by the candidate or external examiner(s). Schools must indicate the chosen format for the oral examination when submitting the Examination Arrangements for approval.

2.5 Outcomes of Oral Examinations

Candidates should familiarise themselves with the Academic Regulations for Postgraduate Research Degrees on the outcomes of first examination and re-examination. Candidates may be recommended for an award 'outright', i.e. with no amendments to be made to the thesis. If there are corrections/revisions to complete, candidates will be given timescales for completion of these in the letter confirming the outcome of their oral examination.

The definitions of research degree outcomes for corrections are as follows:

Minor amendments

Minor amendments, including typographical, formatting or grammatical errors, should not include substantial changes or rewriting of the thesis. Taking into account the volume of minor corrections and revisions the Examiners should determine the length of time to be allowed for the minor amendments up to a maximum of three months.

The internal examiner is responsible for checking and approving any minor amendments.

Major Revisions (for MPhil, PhD and MD and MCh only)

Major revisions are matters which are in excess of minor amendments, but not, in the

opinion of the examiners, sufficient to require the student to revise and resubmit. Major revisions may involve limited additional work and rewriting of sections.

Major revisions must be completed within a period of three to a maximum of six months from the date of the latest part of the examination. The internal examiner and at least one external examiner (if two external examiners) will be responsible for checking and approving any major revisions. Following submission of major revisions, the examiners may then recommend award or further minor amendments, which should be completed within a maximum of four weeks.

Re-examination

Re-examination indicates that the student has not yet satisfied the examiners that the level of the award for which the thesis was submitted has been reached. Substantial rewriting is required to make the thesis meet the required standard. It may involve substantial rewriting of sections, the introduction of new material, further research, further analysis of the material, or further developments of the arguments.

The examiners should ensure that the student is explicitly informed that he or she has not reached the standard for the award and, where the examination is for the award of PhD, an indication of whether the MPhil standard has been met.

The examiners should indicate the scope of the work required to the thesis. The minimum length of time allowed for a resubmission is six months and the maximum is 12 months in the case of MPhil, PhD, MCh and MD. The minimum time allowed is three months and the maximum is six months for MA, MSc or LLM (by Research) degrees.

Examiners will also confirm whether a further oral examination is required.

2.6   Appeals against Examination Decisions
If a candidate wishes to appeal against the examiners' decision, they should refer to the Academic Appeals Procedure in the Assessment Handbook for Taught Programmes.

2.7   Completing the Degree
There are a number of requirements which need to be met before a research degree can be conferred:

2.7.1 Once examiners have given notification of recommendation for the degree, students are required to supply two loose copies of their thesis for final hard-binding for the candidate and their Director of Studies. A third volume will be required where there is a collaborating institution for the project.

2.7.2 Candidates are also required to deposit an electronic copy of their thesis with the UCLan Research Repository – Central Lancashire Online Knowledge repository (CLoK).

2.8   Checklist following recommendation for award
Upon approval of amendments/revisions by the examiner(s) candidates must provide the Academic Registry with:

➢ requisite unbound copies of the thesis for final hard-binding
➢ electronic copy of the thesis (pdf format)

- ➢ Thesis Submission form
- ➢ A copy of the proof-reading statement (if applicable)
- ➢ Collect bound copy of thesis from the Academic Registry
- ➢ Notify the Academic Registry of any change of address

2.9   Award

The recommendation for award will then be submitted to the Research Degrees Board who will confer the award on behalf of the Academic Board, after which the candidate will receive a formal letter of conferment.

3. Mitigating Circumstances for Research Degree Programmes and the Research Element of Professional Doctorates

Mitigating Circumstances arise where students suffer from some illness or other misfortune that adversely affects their ability to complete a research degree milestone or other deadline at any point during the research degree programme including post-viva. The University has adopted robust procedures to ensure that such circumstances are dealt with systematically and that students are treated equitably across all Schools.

The process is not intended to supersede normal requests for Authorised Interruptions to Study during the programme or operate at the day-to-day level of requests for short-term deadline extensions to research degree milestones or other deadlines which can occur at any point during the research degree programme including post-viva, or other matters which can (and should) be dealt with at the time by the Academic Registry.

3.2 Evidence to support a request for Mitigating Circumstances
In most cases, evidence demonstrating the impact of the student's circumstances will be required.

3.3 Responsibility of Students
The onus for reporting and corroborating mitigating circumstances lies with the student (or arranging for a representative with written permission to submit on their behalf) in accordance with the published process. Students should submit a request for mitigating circumstances as soon as possible and before the original deadline has expired.

3.4 Responsibility of Research Degree Tutors
Where students face significant unplanned and unforeseen events which have a greater impact on their studies and which cannot be solved by a short-term extension (and therefore cannot be dealt with by the Academic Registry), they will be referred to the Research Degrees Tutor and considered on a case-by-case basis. The Research Degrees Tutor will determine the outcome and any further action to be taken, which may be in consultation with the student, their supervisor(s), and the Research Degrees Board.

Mitigating circumstances following an oral examination or Transfer viva/outcome should be referred to the Chair of the Research Degrees Board.

3.5 Responsibility of Research Degrees Board
In using its academic judgement, the Research Degrees Board may also take account of mitigating circumstances at any point during the research degree programme including post-viva.

The Chair of the Research Degrees Board will receive mitigating circumstances following an oral examination or the Transfer viva/outcome and consider whether to disseminate the information to the examiners/assessors if it is considered that these would have made a difference to the outcome of the oral examination, or to ask the examiners/assessors to reconsider their recommendation.

3.6 Responsibility of Examiners
Mitigating circumstances will be taken into consideration as appropriate in the determination of the performance at the oral examination/Transfer viva and outcome. Examiners/ assessors have the power to suspend an oral examination/ transfer viva on notification of mitigating circumstances on the day of the examination/Transfer viva if they feel it is necessary.

Where mitigating circumstances are submitted, these will be reported to the examiners/assessors for consideration. If the circumstances are held to be valid, discretion may be operated in a number of ways. The following are examples of action that may be taken:

- To suspend the oral examination/Transfer viva and reschedule it for a later date.
- To allow a further oral examination/Transfer viva.
- To provide an alternative form of examination from the original where this is felt appropriate to individual circumstances.

Examiners/assessors may also take the view, having considered the mitigating circumstances that the student's academic performance was not affected, and that discretion should not be operated. In such instances the student's performance will be assessed purely either on the thesis and the oral examination or on the Transfer report and the Transfer viva. This may result in a fail recommendation.

4. Presentation and Preparation of Research

Students are advised to follow the published guidance on the presentation and preparation of a thesis (or synoptic commentary for awards by Published Work/Portfolio).

4.1 Practice-based Theses

4.1.1 Practice-based material
Students whose submissions include work of a practice-based nature must provide an accessible and permanent record of the practice-based work. This must be stored in a way that is manageable, accessible and retrievable. If for example the practice-based work takes the form of exhibition, performance, broadcast or other temporal event, the work is required to be recorded and documented in the form of photographs, digital recordings, scores, drawings, digital recordings using appropriate media.

The written documentation and the practical components for the research degree combined will make up 100% of the submission for examination. Individual supervision teams may agree certain parameters for the ratio of practice to written work according to the nature of the field, discipline and/or research degree investigation.

4.1.2 Critical editions
Students who undertake a programme of research of which the principal focus is the preparation of a scholarly edition of a text or texts, musical or choreographic work of other original artefacts must include a copy of the edited text(s) or collection of artefact(s), appropriate textual and explanatory annotations and a substantial introduction and critical commentary which sets the text in the relevant historical, theoretical or critical context.

4.1.3 Published Works/Portfolio
Wherever possible the Published Works/Portfolio should be included as published and bound behind the synoptic commentary. Where this is not possible then each item must be clearly labelled with a numbering system as detailed in the Table of Contents.

4.2 Length of Thesis
The text of the thesis should not normally exceed the following length (excluding ancillary data). These word counts are intended as a guide only. Students should seek further advice from their supervisory team.

Medicine, Science and Engineering

PhD	40,000 words
MPhil	20,000 words
MA\MSc (by Research)	15,000 words
MD (Res) and MCh (Res)	30,000 words

Art and Design, Humanities, Health, Social Sciences and Education

PhD	80,000 words
MPhil	40,000 words
MA\MSc (by Research)	25,000 words
LLM (by Research)	25,000 words

Where the thesis is accompanied by substantive material in other than written form, is practice-based, or the research involves creative writing or the preparation of a scholarly edition, it is recommended that the written thesis should not normally exceed the following word counts:

PhD	30,000 - 40,000 words
MD (Res)	20,000 - 30,000 words
MPhil	15,000 - 20,000 words
MA\MSc\LLM (by Research)	10,000 - 15,000 words

PhD (by Published Work) - The text of the Synoptic Commentary should not normally exceed 10,000 words (excluding ancillary data).

PhD by Portfolio – the Portfolio will consist of up to three project areas synthesised through a synoptic report. The text of the Synoptic Commentary should not normally exceed 15,000 words (excluding ancillary data).

4.3 Professional Doctorates
Professional Doctorate Students undertaking the thesis module should refer to their module specification and their Module or Course Leader for guidance on specific requirements related to their programme.

5. Policy on Proof-reading for Research Degree Programmes and the Research Element of Professional Doctorate Programmes

This policy is to clarify the use of third parties for proof-reading for student's written work for Research Programme Approval, Transfer from MPhil to PhD, the thesis (or synoptic commentary) and any work which later forms part of the final thesis. This applies to all written work or the thesis, whether draft or a final version, submitted for these assessments whether the proof-reading is for the whole or part of the work.

5.1 Principles
(i) Each student's work must be solely his/her own work.
(ii) Students at postgraduate level are expected to have developed their own proof-reading skills to a suitably advanced level for the award and be aware of the difference between proof-reading and editing. Students may have their theses proof-read. However, editing is the sole responsibility of the student.
(iii) Students should receive advice and guidance on the drafting of any work and the thesis for submission from their supervisors and any designated advisors. Supervisors will assist with proof-reading.
(iv) Students who consider they need assistance on the use of English should contact WISER.
(v) Students must not employ any person to write any parts or the complete work on his or her behalf, whether from professional companies, family, personal friends, other students or any other person except where an amanuensis has been appointed for the student as part of the student's disability support through UCLan's Inclusivity Service. Inadequate skills in written English will not be justification for use of an amanuensis or a writer.
(vi) Students must make all alterations to their work or their thesis themselves.
(vii) Students are responsible for interpreting the advice of any proof-reader employed.

5.2 Engagement of third party proof-reading services
If a student employs a third party then the student is responsible for acknowledging the assistance with proof- reading. Any assistance must be acknowledged in a statement in the work or the thesis.

The student is also responsible for clarifying the limits for the assistance. It is a requirement that:

- the student provides the third party with a copy of this policy and obtains a confirmatory statement of acceptance from that party;
- the student provides the third party with paper copies for annotation;
- students should retain the copy of the proof-reader's annotated work until the assessment process is complete.

Warnings: students are warned that any use of third party proof-reading services must not compromise their authorship of the work submitted, and, in particular, that the substance of work must remain the student's own. Students are also warned that they will be held responsible for work which they submit, and that the use of third party services will not be accepted in mitigation of any deficiencies in the work.

5.3 Unfair Means to Enhance Performance
Where a student does not follow the policy and is considered to have used a third party for non- permitted forms of assistance then the matter will be dealt with under the Unfair Means to Enhance Performance Procedure.

Students must ensure they are aware of and abide by the regulations and policies.

5.4 Turnitin

Turnitin may be used to assist with plagiarism detection. Where plagiarism is potentially identified, this will be investigated in accordance with the University's Academic Misconduct Procedure.

5.5 Permitted Assistance and Advice

In the main text, tables, diagrams, footnotes, endnotes and illustrations proof-readers may suggest corrections with regard to:

✓ Spelling and punctuation
✓ Formatting
✓ Compliance with English conventions on grammar and syntax
✓ Consistency of page numbers, headings and footnotes

5.6 Non-Permissable Assistance and Advice

Changing any text, table diagram, or illustration in the following ways by proof-readers (or as a result of their advice) is not permitted:

✖ to clarify arguments or ideas
✖ to develop arguments or ideas
✖ to change arguments or ideas
✖ to correct factual information
✖ to translate work into English
✖ to reduce the length of the work
✖ to assist with referencing

5.7 Method for Third Party Advice

Access to the source document to be submitted for the assessment should remain solely with the student and not be passed to the third party.

The third party undertaking the proofreading should give any advice by a means which provides a record showing the changes recommended.

The student must consider the changes advised, interpret them accordingly and undertake the changes personally. Students are responsible for ensuring that the advice given does not alter the intended meaning or use subject specific terminology in the wrong context.