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**Research Degrees**

**Examination Guidelines**

**MPhil/PhD and Professional Doctorates**

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# **1 Introduction**

This document outlines the regulations (RD relates to MPhil/PhD and PD relates to Professional Doctorates), arrangements and procedures for the examination and award of research degrees. They include extracts from the [Research Degrees Regulations](https://help.open.ac.uk/documents/policies/research-degree-regulations) which should be referred to during the examination process. Should there be any discrepancies between this document and the Research Degree Regulations, it is the Research Degree Regulations that take precedence. If you have any queries or require advice, please contact the Research Degrees Team.

For all students in ARCs: Research-Degrees-ARC@open.ac.uk

For directly supported students, use the relevant mailbox:

Research-Degrees-DHSC@open.ac.uk

Research-Degrees-EdD@open.ac.uk

Research-Degrees-FASS@open.ac.uk

Research-Degrees-FBL@open.ac.uk

Research-Degrees-STEM@open.ac.uk

Research-Degrees-WELS@open.ac.uk

External address: Internal address:

Research Degrees Team Research Degrees Team

The Open University Library Building

Milton Keynes

MK7 6AA

All the forms required in this process are at <http://www.open.ac.uk/students/research/forms-and-guidance>

Supporting guidance information is shown in *italics*.

These guidelines apply to MPhil/PhD and Professional Doctorate students.

# **2 Notification of submission**

Students must give three months’ notice, via [PGR Manager](https://doctoral-research-system.open.ac.uk/do/ou-auth/login), to the Research Degrees Team (or Affiliated Research Centre Research Degrees Coordinator), of their intention to submit a thesis for the award of a research degree. Notification should include confirmation of the thesis title, a provisional date for submission, and if the thesis contains a non-book component, clarification of the extent and type of non-book material to be submitted (**RD 17.1; PD 15.1**).

*The student should declare if they have a disability or any additional requirements for which adjustments may need to be made when the examination is arranged.*

*Failure to comply with the notice of submission requirements may lead to a delay in the examination.*

# **3 Nomination and Appointment of the Examination Panel**

Recommendations for the constitution of an examination panel must be made a minimum of 3 months ahead of thesis submission, in tandem with the student’s intention to submit and no later than three months before the maximum registration date. Recommendations are made to the Progress Board by the Associate Dean Research (or equivalent) or the Affiliated Research Centre Research Degrees Coordinator in consultation with the supervisors (**RD 18.2; PD 16.2**).

*The nomination should be made on the Examination Panel Nomination Form, on* [*PGR Manager*](https://doctoral-research-system.open.ac.uk/do/ou-auth/login) *and accompanied by a full, up to date CV for each nominated member of the examination panel.*

*The internal supervisors or the Associate Dean Research (or delegate), Programme Leader, or ARC Research Degrees Coordinator should approach the examiners before they are formally nominated to check that they are willing to accept the appointment should it be approved by the Progress Board and that they are willing to comply with the UKVI requirements for ‘Right to Work’ checks.*

*If the thesis contains a non-book component (please see* ***RD 17.7 to RD 17.9; PD 15.7 to PD 15.8*** *or is over-length* ***RD 17.5; PD 15.5)*** *potential examiners should be made aware at this stage.*

## Composition of the examination panel (RD 18.3 to RD 18.4; PD 16.3 to PD 16.4)

The constitution of an examination panel must include an independent examination panel Chair and either:

a) An internal and a minimum of one external examiner

b) A minimum of two external examiners.

Where a student is an employee of The Open University the panel must include a minimum of two external examiners.

Those nominated for appointment as members of an examination panel should be independent and should not have had any influence on the design or implementation of the student’s research project. Any potential conflicts of interest (a non-exhaustive list can be found in Appendix 4 of the regulations or in Appendix 1 of this document) should be declared at the point of nomination.

## 3.2 Appointment criteria for the examination panel chair (RD 18.7 to RD 18.8; PD 16.7 to PD 16.8)

The appointment of an independent examination panel Chair should be made against the following criteria:

a) Experience of UK research degree examination as an examiner and normally of research degree supervision to successful completion.

b) Currently a member of academic or research staff at The Open University or Affiliated Research Centre of Lecturer or Research Associate status or above.

c) Familiarity with the research degree regulations and [QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications](https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/qualifications-frameworks.pdf) for the award of research degrees (see section 7).

d) Has received, or will be in receipt of, prior to the *viva voce* examination, training in the roles and responsibilities of a Chair.

e) Training must not take the form of shadowing a nominated Chair during a student’s viva voce exam

A Chair should not be currently registered for a research degree, other than a Higher Doctorate, at this or any other institution.

Visiting professors/academics, research fellows (including post-doctoral researchers), emeritus professors and honorary associates of the University or Affiliated Research Centre may be appointed as a Chair provided that they meet the criteria set out above.

*It is not necessary for the Chair to be from the same discipline or faculty as the candidate’s thesis. The Chair is there to ensure the viva process is carried out in line with the regulations and is not required to have any subject specific knowledge.*

## 3.3 Appointment criteria for examiners (RD 18.10 to RD 18.14; PD 16.10 to PD 16.14)

The appointment of examiners should be made against the following criteria:

a) Be qualified and have current experience and expertise in the field of the thesis to be examined.

b) Have experience of UK research degree supervision to successful completion and/or examination.

c) Collectively have experience of examining a minimum of five UK Doctoral degrees for the examination of a PhD/PD or a minimum of five UK MPhils or Doctoral degrees for the examination of a MPhil.

An examiner should not be currently registered for a research degree, other than a Higher Doctorate, at this or any other institution.

Internal examiners should be members of academic staff at The Open University or Affiliated Research Centre of Lecturer status or above. Visiting professors/academics, research fellows (including post-doctoral researchers), emeritus professors and honorary associates of the University or Affiliated Research Centre may be appointed as internal examiners provided that they meet the criteria set out above. Associate Lecturers who also hold an academic position at the Open University or elsewhere may be appointed as internal examiners.

External examiners should normally be members of academic staff at a university or research institution, at Lecturer status or above. They should not normally be from the same department as the student’s external supervisor.

Former members of The Open University staff or an Affiliated Research Centre may not be appointed as an external examiner unless they left the University or Affiliated Research Centre at least three years previously.

Retired or emeritus staff of The Open University or an Affiliated Research Centre may not be appointed as external examiners.

## 3.4 Term of appointment of an examination panel (RD 18.6; PD 16.6)

Examination panels are appointed for the duration of the examination process, including resubmission and re-examination, unless exceptional circumstances arise.

## 3.5 Communications (RD 18.16; PD 16.16)

Once the panel is appointed all communication with the examiners on matters related to the thesis and or/the examination until such a time as there is a final outcome must be carried out through the examination panel Chair, the Research Degrees Team, the Affiliated Research Centre Research Degrees Coordinator, the Chair of Research Degrees Examination Results Approval Committee or the Progress Board. The supervisors and student must only communicate via the Exam Panel Chair if they need to seek clarification on any matter.

*Please ensure that all such communications are documented.*

## 3.6 The Observer (RD 18.17; PD 16.17)

One of the student’s supervisors (or other member of the school approved by the Associate Dean Research (or delegate), or Programme Leader may, at the request of the student, be present at the examination in the role of observer. The request must be confirmed in writing to the Research Degrees Team.

It is not permissible for any other additional persons to be present at the examination, subject to the provisions of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (**RD 18.20; PD 16.20**)

## *3.7 Approval of nominations*

*The examination panel nominated by the Associate Dean Research (or delegate), Programme Leader or ARC Research Degrees Coordinator must be approved by the Progress Board (****RD 18.1; PD 16.1****). Once the panel has been approved, the Research Degrees Team will send formal offers of appointment to the examiners and inform the student of the examiners’ names.*

*The thesis will be sent to the approved examiners as soon as the thesis and the Candidate Declaration Form have been received, and the examiners have signed and returned their contracts.*

*The thesis must be sent out via the Research Degrees Team and not directly to the examiners.*

# **Duties of the Examination Panel**

## 4.1 Duties of the examination panel chair (RD 18.9; PD 16.9)

The role of the examination panel Chair is neutral in the assessment process and the examination panel Chair should take no part in the actual assessment of the thesis. It is the role of the examination panel Chair:

a) to oversee, and to inform the Research Degrees Team of the arrangements for the examination;

b) to ensure that the examiners prepare independent pre-*viva* reports (see section 6.2.1) in a timely manner;

c) to identify with the examiners the main points to be raised at the examination;

d) to confirm with the examiners and the observer the role of the observer at the examination and in the examiners’ meetings if invited to attend to answer a specific question;

e) in cases where the submitted thesis contains a non-book component, to take account of the specific requirements and ensure that all members of the panel, the student and the observer are fully briefed as to how the examination will proceed;

f) to chair the examination and the examiners’ meetings pre- and post- examination as required;

g) to ensure that the examination is conducted according to the University’s regulations and procedures and that the examiners are able to complete their oral examination to their satisfaction;

h) to ensure that the Examination Report Form is completed diligently and agreed by all the examiners at the end of the examination. This should include a report on the examination and a recommendation on the award of the degree. If amendments are required, they should be specified in the relevant section of the Examination Report Form. Attachments can be added where required;

i) to ensure that any amendments specified in the Examination Report Form match the criteria / examples associated with the appropriate recommended outcome in regulation RD 19.11/ PD 17.11;

j) to send by email the completed Examination Report Form, any list of amendments which are not specified in the report and the examiners’ independent pre-*viva* reports to the Research Degrees Team or Affiliated Research Centre Research Degrees Coordinator for onward transmission to the Research Degrees Team, within two working days of the *viva* voce;

k) to clarify to participants in the examination that the recommended outcome is preliminary and subject to approval by the Research Degree Examination Results Approval Committee, and to ensure that in the light of this the feedback given to the student is appropriate.

*The examination panel Chair does not assess whether the student has met the requirements of the degree or make a recommendation on the award of the degree. They are not required to read the thesis or prepare a pre-viva report.*

## 4.2 Duties of the examiners (RD 18.15; PD 16.15)

It is the role of the examiners to:

a) Abide by the University’s contractual confidentiality statement: As set out in the External Examiner Acceptance form and Appendix 5 of the Regulations (appendix 2 of this document)

b) Prepare an independent pre-*viva* report, (RD 19.4; PD 17.4, see section 6.2.1).

c) Identify the main points to be raised at the examination.

d) Assess with the other examiner(s) whether the student has met the requirements of the relevant degree.

e) Make a recommendation with the other examiner(s) on the award of the degree and any amendments required.

f) Check corrections/amendments to the thesis following the *viva voce* examination as specified in RD 19.11; PD 17.11.

g) Abide by the University’s contractual confidentiality statement (Appendix 5 of the regulations or in Appendix 2 of this document)

*Details relating to payment and expenses for examiners can be found in Appendix 3.*

## 4.3 Role of the observer (RD 18.18 to RD 18.19; PD 15.18 to 15.19)

The role of the observer is to attend the *viva voce* and to:

a) Provide the candidate with a reassuring presence in the *viva voce*.

b) Provide post-viva support the student in the interpretation of the examination panel’s requests for any amendments to the thesis.

c) The observer must play no part in the viva, nor interact with the student or the examiners except where there are concerns over the welfare of the student

In addition the observer may, at the request of the examiners, provide an explanation to the examination panel at either the pre- or post-*viva* examination meeting on an aspect of the student’s research e.g., relating to problems with access to data. The participation of an observer in these meetings should be limited to answering specific requests for information from the examiners.

It is not permissible for any other additional persons to be present at the examination, subject to the provisions of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001.

# **5 Submission**

## *5.1 Eligibility*

*To be eligible to submit a thesis for examination, the student must:*

*a) be currently registered for the degree for which submission is intended, a student who has exceeded the maximum registration period cannot submit their thesis (please see* ***RD 7.3 & RD 7.5; PD 6.3 & PD 6.5****)*

*b) have completed the minimum period of study specified for the degree (****RD 7.4; PD 6.4****)*

*c) not be in debt to the University (please see the Fee Rules (Postgraduate Research Students)).*

*Once the thesis has been submitted the Research Degrees Committee requires the viva voce examination to take place even if the examiners consider the submission not to be of the required standard.*

## 5.2 What needs to be submitted? (RD 17.2; PD 15.2)

Within the appropriate minimum and maximum periods of study for the degree (**RD 7.4; PD 6.4**), students are required to submit an electronic copy of their thesis together with any supporting material to the Research Degrees Team (or Affiliated Research Centre Research Degrees Coordinator). In addition, the student must provide:

a) an abstract

b) a completed Candidate Declaration Form indicating

i) any material that has been published

ii) material that has previously been submitted by them for a degree or other qualification to this or any other university or institution,

iii) where work is collaborative, what part of it is their independent contribution

iv) that the thesis count is within the regulations or, if not, that a waiver has been granted

v) where work is collaborative, acknowledgement that an agreement is in place between all parties in relation to the use of data, data collection, the use of data from field work and/or placement

vi) that the material submitted is the copy that they intend to be examined.

The thesis must comply with regulations **RD 17.3** and **RD 17.4** (**PD 15.3** and **PD 15.4**) and must conform to the standards outlined in The Open University Thesis Submission Guidelines.

*The student’s submission will only be sent to the examiners once the Candidate Declaration Form has been received by the Research Degrees Team and the examiners have signed and returned their contracts.*

##

## 5.3 Expectations

 **Master of Philosophy**

A Master of Philosophy degree may be awarded to a candidate who has demonstrated, through the presentation and defence of a thesis, to the satisfaction of the examiners that the expectations outlined in Appendix 1 A have been met (**RD 1.2** (please see section 7.1)).

 **Doctor of Philosophy**

 A Doctor of Philosophy degree may be awarded to a candidate who has demonstrated, through the presentation and defence of a thesis, to the satisfaction of the examiners that the expectations outlined in Appendix 1 B have been met (**RD 1.3** (please see section 7.2)).

 **Professional Doctorate**

 A Professional Doctorate may be awarded to a candidate who has demonstrated, through the presentation and defence of a thesis, to the satisfaction of the examiners that the expectations outlined in Appendix 1 B have been met (**PD 1.2** (please see section 7.2)).

 The thesis must be written in English unless the student is in receipt of prior permission, under the terms of their letter of registration as a student of the University, to submit the work in Welsh or Gaelic. Brief quotations in foreign languages are permitted[[1]](#footnote-1) (**RD 17.4; PD 15.4**)

The length of the thesis must be appropriate to the subject area covered and must not (including footnotes) exceed:

a) 60,000 words for the Master of Philosophy

b) 100,000 words for the Doctor of Philosophy

c) 140,000 words for a creative writing Doctor of Philosophy

d) 65,000 words for the Professional Doctorate.

 In exceptional cases a student may, with the support of their Faculty, Institute or Affiliated Research Centre request permission from the Progress Board to submit a thesis of greater length. Such requests must be submitted a minimum of three months prior to submission of the thesis (**RD 17.5; PD 15.5**). Agreement to submit overlength theses is also contingent on agreement by the Examiners as sought by the Progress Board. Corrected theses submitted after an outcome of minor corrections and modification or an outcome of substantial amendments are not subject to the maximum word length. Theses being submitted for a second examination following an outcome of resubmission and re-viva following an outcome of major revision must comply to the maximum word count

Non-book components (**RD 17.7 to RD 17.9; PD 15.7 to PD 15.8**)

The volume of material contained in a combined book and non-book thesis should not exceed the maximum word lengths outlined in **RD 17.5a**, **RD 17.5b and PD 15.5**.

For a non-book thesis the written component should include, *inter alia,* strong arguments that:

a) convey the conceptual underpinning of the research in the context of the field;

b) thoroughly locate the research within the relevant literature;

c) clearly and fully explain the methodology used;

d) provide a clear explanation of how the non-book components exemplify and develop the ideas described in the written material;

e) lead to a conclusion that, at a minimum, should summarise the key findings of the research and its relevance to the extant literature.

A detailed exposition of practices and/or technical skills in themselves is not a requirement, nor a substitute for a part or whole of a Doctoral thesis.

Creative writing thesis **(RD 17.9)**

Students may submit their own creative work forms together with the thesis, if those creative work forms are essential to the thesis, as a point of origin or reference, or as a substantial part of the intellectual enquiry. The creative work must be clearly presented in relation to the argument of the written thesis and the creative work should be set in its relevant theoretical, historical, and critical or design context. The final submission must be accompanied by some permanent record of the creative work, which where practicable is bound within the thesis. Combined word lengths should adhere to the provisions contained within **RD 17.5c.**

# **6 The Examination Process**

## 6.1 Arrangements for the examination

 Upon receipt of the thesis and associated documentation (RD 17.2; PD 15.2 (see section 5.2)), and providing that the examination panel has been approved (RD 18.1; PD 16.1(see section 3.7)), the Research Degrees Team (or the Affiliated Research Centre Research Degrees Coordinator where the student is registered through an Affiliated Research Centre), is solely responsible for confirming receipt to the Chair and sending copies to the examiners together with a copy of Part 1 of the Candidate Declaration form (RD 19.2; PD 17.2).

 Upon receipt of the thesis, the examination panel Chair should contact the examiners, the student and the observer to make arrangements for the *viva voce*. This should normally be within six weeks of the date of submission of the thesis (RD 19.3; PD 17.3).

 *The Examination arrangements form should be completed and returned to the Research Degrees Team as soon as possible and normally no later than two weeks in advance of the date of the examination.*

*Where the pre-examination meeting (section 6.2.2.1) or the post-examination meeting (section 6.2.2.3) of the examination panel takes place over lunch, the Research Degrees Team will meet the hospitality costs for the examiners and the examination panel Chair.*

*The Research Degrees Team will confirm the examination arrangements to all concerned.*

## 6.2 The Examination (RD 19.1; PD 17.1)

The examination of an MPhil, PhD, or a Professional Doctorate will have the following stages;

a) The submission and preliminary assessment of the thesis by the examiners.

b) The defence of the thesis during an oral examination.

c) The assessment and re-examination of any revisions, as appropriate.

### 6.2.1 Independent Pre-*Viva* Examiner Reports (RD 19.4 to RD 19.5; PD 17.4 to PD 17.5)

Each examiner is required to read the thesis and consider whether it satisfies the requirements for the degree as outlined in section 7. They should each then complete and submit, in confidence and independently of all other parties, the Pre-*viva* report form to the examination panel Chair normally a minimum of five working days before the examination. The forms should be forwarded in confidence to the Research Degrees Team, or where the student is registered through an Affiliated Research Centre, the Affiliated Research Centre Research Degrees Coordinator, by the examination panel Chair upon receipt.

Upon receipt of the Pre-*viva* report forms from all of the examiners, the examination panel Chair may share them in confidence across the examination panel. They should not be shared with the student, their supervisors or the observer.. Any breach of the confidentiality of the forms and recommendations therein may invalidate the examination.

### 6.2.2 The Oral Examination (RD 19.6 to RD 19.7; PD 17.6 to PD 17.7)

All examiners must participate in the oral examination. It is recommended that the *viva voce* examination will take place face-to-face with all of the participants in the same location, however further to the provisions outlined in **RD** 19.6 or Appendix 4 the viva voce examination may, at the student’s of examiners’ request, take place in a hybrid fashion (some participants online) or fully online (every participant engaged online from sperate locations).

The student must attend and participate in the entire viva voce examination and failure to do so will lead to an outcome of ‘fail’ with no automatic right to a second viva voce examination

#### Pre-examination panel meeting (RD 19.8; PD 17.8)

The examination panel should meet prior to the examination to:

a) Consider the preliminary reports and the thesis.

b) Confirm the structure of the questioning and the main points to be raised at the examination.

c) Identify any issues that require additional information from the observer.

The observer should not be present at this meeting unless **RD 19.8c or PD 17.8c** applies.

***Viva voce***

Examinations usually last two to three hours depending on the nature of the thesis, however there are no minimum or maximum times for a viva.

The examination should cover all aspects of the thesis and confirm that the thesis is the student’s own original work (**RD 19.9; PD 17.9**).

*The student should be given an opportunity to comment on any adverse points and on any revisions which the examiners intend to recommend.*

*The examination may include the inspection of experimental apparatus, demonstration of software, viewing of original data or other reasonable requests from the examiners. The examiners should ensure that the student is aware of any such requests in advance of the examination.*

*The student may take an annotated copy of the thesis and other source materials to the examination.*

*In the case of an adverse recommendation, the examiners should make clear to the student that their intended recommendation is based on the written thesis, and the examination offers the student the chance to demonstrate that their knowledge and expertise is of the required level.*

#### Post-examination panel meeting

Following the examination, the examination panel should meet in the absence of the student to discuss the recommended outcome and complete the Examination Report Form (**RD 19.10; PD 17.10**). The observer may only be present at the request of the examination panel

This must be forwarded together with the Pre-*viva* report forms by the Chair to the Research Degrees Team within two working days of the *viva voce* examination.

*Generally, the panel should inform the student of their recommendation following the examination, after they have completed the requirements of* ***RD 19.10; PD 17.10****.*

*At this stage the decision of the examination panel is only a recommendation to the Research Degrees Examination Result Approval Committee. The decision of the Committee, based on the examiners’ recommendation, is the formal result of the examination; this should be made clear to the student when the examination panel informs them* *of their recommendation.*

# **7 Criteria for the Award of the Degree**

To be awarded the relevant degree, the student’s thesis must fulfil the appropriate criteria as indicated below.

## 7.1 Master of Philosophy (Appendix 1A of the regulations)

**Graduates of research master’s degrees (including the MPhil) typically have:**

i) subject-specific attributes:

• An in-depth knowledge and understanding of the discipline informed by current scholarship and research, including a critical awareness of current issues and developments in the subject.

• The ability to study independently in the subject.

• The ability to use a range of techniques and research methods applicable to advanced scholarship in the subject.

ii) generic attributes (including skills relevant to an employment-setting) A range of generic abilities and skills that include the ability to:

* Use initiative and take responsibility.
* Solve problems in creative and innovative ways.
* Make decisions in challenging situations.
* Continue to learn independently and to develop professionally, including the ability to pursue further research where appropriate.
* Communicate effectively, with colleagues and a wider audience, in a variety of media.

iii) Where a student is pursuing an MPhil following initial registration on to a Professional Doctorate a) enabling students to specialise or to become more highly specialised in an area of employment or practice related to a particular profession b) supporting progression towards professional registration in a particular profession

**Descriptors for a higher education qualification at Master’s level**

Master's degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

• a systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice;

* a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship;

• originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline;

• conceptual understanding that enables the student;

• to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline;

• to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses.

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

• deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, make sound judgements in the absence of complete data, and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences;

• demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level;

• continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and to develop new skills to a high level.

**And holders will have:**

The qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:

• the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility;

• decision-making in complex and unpredictable situations;

• the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development.

## 7.2 Doctor of Philosophy/ Professional Doctorate (Appendix 1B of the regulations)

**Graduates of a doctoral degree should be able to:**

a) search for, discover, access, retrieve, sift, interpret, analyse, evaluate, manage, conserve and communicate an ever-increasing volume of knowledge from a range of sources;

b) think critically about problems to produce innovative solutions and create new knowledge;

c) plan, manage and deliver projects, selecting and justifying appropriate methodological processes while recognising, evaluating and minimising the risks involved and impact on the environment;

d) exercise professional standards in research and research integrity, and engage in professional practice, including ethical, legal, and health and safety aspects, bringing enthusiasm, perseverance and integrity to bear on their work activities;

e) support, collaborate with and lead colleagues, using a range of teaching, communication and networking skills to influence practice and policy in diverse environments;

f) appreciate the need to engage in research with impact and to be able to communicate it to diverse audiences, including the public;

g) build relationships with peers, senior colleagues, students and stakeholders with sensitivity to equality, diversity and cultural issues.

 Furthermore, doctoral researchers are increasingly being encouraged to develop their foreign language and enterprise skills, and to cultivate business acumen.

 All doctoral graduates will have developed, during the course of their research, additional specialist knowledge within their discipline, while those who have studied a professional doctorate are likely to have been required to have particular professional experience that informs the topic of their research studies. They may well also have been required to engage in further study related to that professional field as part of their doctorate.

Finally, doctoral graduates are able to prepare, plan and manage their own career development while knowing when and where to draw on support.

**Descriptors for a higher education qualification at Doctoral level**

Doctoral degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

• the creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline, and merit publication

• a systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline or area of professional practice

• the general ability to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge, applications or understanding at the forefront of the discipline, and to adjust the project design in the light of unforeseen problems

• a detailed understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry.

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

• make informed judgements on complex issues in specialist fields, often in the absence of complete data, and be able to communicate their ideas and conclusions clearly and effectively to specialist and non-specialist audiences

• continue to undertake pure and/or applied research and development at an advanced level, contributing substantially to the development of new techniques, ideas or approaches.

And holders will have:

• the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and largely autonomous initiative in complex and unpredictable situations, in professional or equivalent environments.

# **8 Recommendations Available to Examiners (RD 19.11; PD 17.11)**

The following recommendations are available to the examination panel:

a) The student be awarded the degree.

b) The student be awarded the degree subject to minor corrections and modifications to the thesis.

c) The student be awarded the degree subject to substantial amendments to the thesis.

d) The student be permitted to resubmit their thesis for re-examination and re-*viva* following major revision.

e) In the case of a PhD or Professional Doctorate examination, the student be awarded the degree of MPhil subject to the presentation of the thesis amended to the satisfaction of the examiners and which must meet the expectations for the award as set out in Appendix 1.

f) In the case of a PhD or Professional Doctorate examination, the student be permitted to resubmit their thesis for re-examination and re-*viva* for a MPhil award following major revision.

g) The student be not be awarded the degree and not be permitted to be re-examined.

The outcome should not be influenced by any information that would impact on their ability to complete the corrections within the permitted timeframes. Any information provided that would support the need for a longer timeframe can be put forward to Research Degrees Examination Results Approval Committee for their consideration.

## 8.1 Minor corrections and modifications (RD 19.15 a-e; PD 17.15 a-e)

a) Where the outcome is award ‘subject to minor corrections and modifications’ (**RD 19.11b; PD 17.11b** (please also see Appendix 5)) the student must complete and submit the corrected thesis and a document that explains how they have met the requirements to the Research Degrees Team or the Affiliated Research Centre Research Degrees Coordinator, for onward transmission to the nominated examiner, within three months of the date of the examination outcome letter.

b) The corrections and modifications must be made to the satisfaction of at least one examiner as agreed by the examiners following the *viva*. Examiners may not make additional requirements at this stage.

c) Upon receipt of the corrected thesis, the nominated examiner will, within one month of receipt, independently complete the Corrected thesis form and return it to the Research Degrees Team, or to the Affiliated Research Centre Research Degrees Coordinator for onward transmission to the Research Degrees Team, making one of the following recommendations:

i) the student has completed the corrections and modifications, has met the academic requirements and should be awarded the degree for which they were examined

ii) for a PhD or Professional Doctorate examination the student has failed to make the corrections and modifications and should be awarded a MPhil (subject to the provisions within **RD 19.11e; PD 17.11e**)

iii) the student should not be awarded the degree and should not be permitted to be re-examined.

d) Where the recommendation is that the student be awarded the degree for which they were examined (**RD 19.15 ci; PD 17.15ci**) the Corrected Thesis Form will be forwarded to the Chair of the Research Degrees Examination Results Approval Committee who may approve the award.

e) Where the recommendation is that the student has not completed the corrections and modifications to the required standards (**RD 19.15cii** or **iii**, **PD 17.15cii** or **iii**), the corrected thesis must be considered by the other examiner(s) on the panel who will independently complete a copy of the Corrected Thesis Form. All of the Corrected Thesis Forms will then be forwarded to the Research Degrees Examination Results Approval Committee for consideration as follows:

i) Where the examiners are not in agreement the regulations for non-unanimous decisions will be invoked (**RD 19.28 to RD 19.29; PD 17.28 to PD 17.29**, (see section 9 of this document)).

ii) Where the examiners are in agreement the Research Degrees Examination Results Approval Committee may:

1) Ratify the recommendation of the examination panel. Where the Committee approves a recommendation that the student be awarded the degree, the Committee will formally approve the award at this stage.

2) Request further clarification from the examination panel regarding the recommended outcome.

3) Approve an alternative outcome – when in exceptional circumstances and following consultation with the examination panel where there continues to be a demonstrable inconsistency between the recommendation and other approved examination results.

## 8.2 Substantial amendments (RD 19.15 f-j; PD 17.15 f-j )

1. Where the outcome is award ‘subject to substantial amendments’ (**RD 19.11c; PD 17.11c**, see Appendix 5), the student must complete and submit the corrected thesis and an explanatory document demonstrating how they have met the requirements to the Research Degrees Team, or the Affiliated Research Centre Research Degrees Coordinator, for onward transmission to the examiners, within **six months** of the date of the examination outcome letter.
2. The amendments must be made to the satisfaction of all of the examiners. Examiners may not impose additional requirements at this stage.
3. Upon receipt of the corrected thesis, the examiners will, within one month of receipt, independently complete the Corrected Thesis Form and return it to the Research Degrees Team recommending one of the following options:

i) The student has completed the amendments, has met the academic requirements and should be awarded the degree for which they were examined.

ii) The student has not satisfactorily completed the amendments, or has introduced additional material that requires amendment, and should be permitted a further three months to make minor corrections and modifications. In such cases regulations **RD 19.15a** to **RD 19.15e** (**PD 17.15a** to **PD 17.15e**) will apply.

iii) For a PhD or Professional Doctorate examination the student has failed to make the amendments and should be awarded an MPhil (subject to the provisions within **RD 19.11e; PD 17.11e**).

iv) The student should not be awarded the degree and should not be permitted to be re-examined.

1. Where the recommendation is that the student be awarded the degree for which they were examined (**RD 19.15hi; PD 17.15hi**) the Corrected Thesis Forms will be forwarded to the Chair of the Research Degrees Examination Results Approval Committee who may approve the award.
2. Where the recommendation is that the student has not completed the corrections and amendments to the required standards (**RD 19.15hii or RD 19.15hiii; PD 17.15hii or PD 17.15hiii**), the Corrected Thesis Forms will be forwarded to the Research Degrees Examination Results Approval Committee for consideration as follows:
3. Where the examiners are not in agreement the regulations for non-unanimous decisions will be invoked (**RD 19.28 to RD 19.29; PD 17.28 to PD 17.29**, (see section 9 of this document)).
4. Where the examiners are in agreement the Research Degrees Examination Results Approval Committee may:

1) Ratify the recommendation of the examination panel. Where the Committee approves a recommendation that the student be awarded the degree, the Committee will formally approve the award at this stage.

2) Request further clarification from the examination panel regarding the recommended outcome.

3) Approve an alternative outcome – when in exceptional circumstances and following consultation with the examination panel where there continues to be a demonstrable inconsistency between the recommendation and other approved examination results.

## 8.3 Resubmission and re-examination (RD 19.16 to RD 19.20; PD 16.16 to PD 16.20)

Where the examiners are not satisfied that the student has reached the standard required for the degree, they may recommend that the thesis is revised and resubmitted for re-examination (see Appendix 5). The student must resubmit the revised thesis to the Research Degrees Team or to the Affiliated Research Centre Research Degrees Coordinator in the case of a student registered through an Affiliated Research Centre, within **12 months** of the date of the examination outcome letter.

The revised thesis should be sent to the same examiners who participated in the original *viva*. In exceptional cases where an examiner is no longer available a new examiner will be appointed by the Progress Board in line with **RD 18.1** to **RD 18.6** and **RD 18.10** to **RD 18.16; PD 16.1** to **PD 16.6** and **PD 16.10** to **PD 16.16**. (sections 3.1 and 3.3 of this document)

The re-examination will follow the process set out above in regulations **RD 19.1** to **RD 19.10, PD 17.1** to **PD 17.10** (section 6.2 of this document).

The examiners are required to make a judgement as to whether the candidate has, following revision and re-examination as specified by the examiners on the basis of the previous examination, met the criteria for the relevant degree.

The following recommendations are available to the examination panel upon re-examination:

a) The student be awarded the degree.

b) The student be awarded the degree subject to minor corrections and modifications to the thesis (regulations **RD 19.15a** to **e** apply; **PD 17.15a** to **e** apply (see section 8.1 of this document).

c) The student be awarded the degree subject to substantial amendments to the thesis regulations **RD 19.15f** to **j** apply; **PD 17.15f** to **j** apply, (see section 8.2 of this document).

d) In the case of a PhD or Professional Doctorate examination, the student be awarded the degree of MPhil subject to the presentation of the thesis amended to the satisfaction of the examiners and which must meet the expectations for the award as set out in **Appendix 1** of the regulations (see section 7.1 of this document).

e) The student should not be awarded the degree and should not be permitted to be re-examined.

No further re-examination will be permitted.

## 8.4 Award of an MPhil following a PhD or Professional Doctorate examination (RD 19.24 to RD 19.26; PD 17.24 to PD 17.26)

Where the examiners are not satisfied that the student has reached the standard required for the degree for a doctoral award they may, either at the original *viva* or following re-examination, recommend that the student be awarded the degree of MPhil (**RD 19.11e** or **RD 19.20d; PD 17.11e** or **PD 17.20d**).

Where this recommendation is made following the original *viva voce* examination it may be an outright award or may involve minor corrections an amendments (in which case regulation **RD 19.15a** to **e** applies; **PD 17.15a** to **e** applies (see section 8.1 of this document)), substantial amendments ((in which case regulation **RD 19.15f** to **j** applies; **PD 17.15f** to **j** applies (see section 8.2 of this document)) or resubmission and re-examination for a MPhil degree (in which case regulations **RD 19.16** to **RD 19.20** apply; **PD 17.16** to **PD 17.20** apply (see section 8.3 of this document)).

Where this recommendation is made following resubmission and re-examination it may be an outright award or may involve minor corrections and modifications (in which case regulation **RD 19.15a** to **e** applies; **PD 17.15a** to **e** applies (see section 8.1 of this document)) or substantial amendments (in which case regulation **RD 19.15f** to **j** applies; **PD 17.15f** to **j** applies (see section 8.2 of this document)). The option of resubmission and re-examination is not available at this stage.

## 8.5 No award and student not permitted to be re-examined (RD 19.27; PD 17.27)

Where the examiners are not satisfied that the student has reached the standard required for the award of a degree and recommend that the student be not awarded the degree and not be permitted to be re-examined the Examination report form must include details of:

a) Why the candidate failed to meet the requirements of the relevant degree.

b) Why the examination panel is unable to recommend major revision and resubmission of the thesis.

c) Why, in the case of a PhD or Professional Doctorate examination, an MPhil cannot be recommended.

## 8.6 Failure to meet the deadlines for submission of amendments and/or revisions (RD 19.30 to RD 19.31; PD 17.30 to PD 17.31)

Where following a *viva voce* examination the student is unable to work, they may apply for a study break (please see regulation **RD 9.6**; **PD 8.5**).

In the absence of an approved study break, students are expected to meet the deadline for the submission of their revised thesis. The Research Degrees Team is not authorised to accept any thesis submitted after the deadline. In such circumstances the matter will be referred to the Progress Board together with any evidence of mitigating circumstances which led to the failure to meet the deadline. The Progress Board may accept or refuse the late submission.

# **9 Examiners not in agreement – a non-unanimous decision (RD 19.28 to RD 19.29; PD 17.28 to PD 17.29)**

Where the recommendations are not unanimous the examination panel Chair shall arrange a meeting of the examiners to seek a resolution. If this is not possible the examination panel Chair shall submit their report of the meeting(s), together with the examiners’ separate reports and recommendations to the Research Degrees Examination Results Approval Committee who may:

a) Accept a majority decision.

b) Accept the decision of the external examiner(s).

c) Appoint an additional external examiner.

Where an additional external examiner is appointed, they shall not be informed of the recommendations of the other examiners. On receipt of the report from the additional external examiner the Research Degrees Examination Results Approval Committee will reconsider the outcome and normally accept a majority decision.

# **10 Role of Research Degrees Examination Results Approval Committee**

**(RD 19.13 to RD 19.14 for first examination and RD 19.22 to RD 19.23 following a re-examination; PD 17.13 to PD 17.14 for first examination and PD 17.22 to PD 17.23 following a re-examination)**

Upon receipt of the Examination Report Form and the Pre-*viva* report forms the Research Degrees Examination Results Approval Committee may:

a) Ratify the recommendation of the examination panel. Where the Committee approves a recommendation that the student be awarded the degree, the Committee will formally approve the award at this stage.

b) Request further clarification from the examination panel regarding the recommended outcome.

c) Approve an alternative outcome – when in exceptional circumstances and following consultation with the examination panel, where there continues to be a demonstrable inconsistency between the recommendation and other approved examination results.

Upon receipt of the decision from the Research Degrees Examination Results Approval Committee, the Research Degrees Team will send the examination outcome letter together with a copy of the Examination Report Form to the student, the supervisors and the Associate Dean Research (or delegate), Programme Leader, or for those students registered through Affiliated Research Centres, the Affiliated Research Centre Research Degrees Coordinator, for onward transmission to the student and other relevant stakeholders.

# **11 Post award requirements (RD 20.1; PD 18.1)**

Following confirmation that the academic requirements for the award of the degree have been met students are required to submit an electronic copy of their thesis and any associated documentation / materials to the University Library in accordance with the guidance within The Open University Thesis Submission Guidelines. Students are expected to complete this within one month of the award letter. A degree certificate will only be issued upon completion of this requirement. Students should ensure their address is up to date as the degree will be sent to this address.

# **Appendix 1**

# **Conflicts of Interest**

The non-exhaustive list below represents potential conflicts of interest that should be taken into account when appointing examination panels.

a) Plans to employ the candidate.

b) Co-publication with the candidate, the supervisor, examination panel Chair (within the last five years) or an intention to do so. Please note that where there are a significant number of publications the five-year rule may be superseded by (e) below.

c) Submission of a research funding application in which the candidate or the supervisors are involved.

d) Where a close personal relationship is defined as ‘where two adults are married or in a de facto relationship, or two adults who are not married or in a de facto relationship live together and provide each other with domestic support and personal care’

e) Involvement, past or present with the candidate, the supervisors or other members of an examination panel in a close personal relationship.

f) Involvement, past or present with the candidate, the supervisors or other members of an examination panel in a close professional or contractual relationship.

g) Is related to another member of the examination panel.

h) A past student of any of the supervisors, with an ongoing professional relationship with the supervisors.

i) Acted on a regular basis in the capacity of an external examiner for a particular supervisor and/or department or Affiliated Research Centre, where applicable.

j) Acted as an external supervisor for another current or recent student in that department or Affiliated Research Centre, where applicable.

k) Acted as a third party monitor for the candidate.

Where an internal examiner has previously acted as a mini-*viva* assessor they are not on that basis alone deemed to have a conflict of interest.

# **Appendix 2**

# **The Open University’s confidentiality statement**

Members of staff may in the course of their duty with the University have access to confidential information, in particular, that relating to assignments, examination papers and marks, as well as personal information on applicants, students, graduates and staff. Such information should not (either during or after service with the University) be divulged without due authorisation. All members of staff must abide by the provisions of the Data Protection Act and should inform themselves of the University's Code of Practice, available from Heads of Units.

External examiners must comply with the confidentiality statement as set out in the External Examiner Acceptance form.

Staff are not normally required to give any written undertaking of secrecy in connection with their work, but the University may make exceptions to this practice in certain circumstances. A report of any such exceptions and a brief statement of the reasons will be made to the OU and BUCU (University College Union) Negotiating Committee each year.

# ***Appendix 3***

# ***Honoraria payments and Expenses***

*Honoraria payments*

*Honoraria payments for external examiners, and external supervisors who act as the observer, are specified in their appointment letters. Payment is made when the examination recommendations have been approved by the Research Degrees Examination Result Approval Committee.*

*There is no honoraria payment for examination panel Chairs or internal examiners.*

*Expenses*

*External examiners, and external supervisors who act as the observer or internal examiner, may claim for travel, subsistence, postage and telephone expenses associated with the examination or the subsequent checking of the corrected thesis.*

*Travel is reimbursed for the* ***actual cost of******standard class public transport****. Approval for travel by car will be granted if the use of public transport is genuinely not possible, a full explanation must be provided. All claims should be made on Open University claim forms. Expenses should be claimed within one month of the expenditure being incurred.*

*The Graduate School is unable to cover travel costs to and from the UK. The Research Degrees Team will pay travel and subsistence costs up to a maximum of £250 for an external examiner who is based outside of the UK. If you wish to nominate someone from outside of the UK, the Examination Panel Nomination Form should be used to clarify whether they will incur expenses over this limit. If appropriate, please include the academic unit and/or department budget code from which expenses over the £250 maximum will be paid.*

*Examination panel Chairs, internal examiners, and internal supervisors who act as the observer, may claim expenses only if the examination is not held at their usual place of work. Claims should be made using the electronic expense claim system.*

# **Appendix 4**

# **Remote participation in a *viva voce* examination**

Hybrid or fully online viva voce examinations much meet the following provisions:

1. the student must give signed consent to being examined by a panel where the external examiner(s) is/are participating by video conference or where each participant is engaging remotely;
2. there is reliable and effective technology, in most cases this will be video conferencing facilities, at The Open University campus or the Affiliated Research Centre or other location where the participants are located, and that this is used as the means of conducting the examination remotely;
3. The Open University Faculty or the Affiliated Research Centre will accept responsibility for the technical arrangements for the viva voce examination;
4. contingency arrangements will be made should the technology fail on the day. The backup should be of a comparable standard (e.g. Skype or telephone conferencing). Please note however that video conference is the requisite means of conducting a viva voce examination with a remote participant. Where a contingency is put into place the arrangement must be discussed and agreed with the student.
5. wherever the viva voce takes place, the supervisory team must ensure that the student has appropriate support before and after the examination, and written evidence of this will be provided to the Examination Panel Chair.

# ***Appendix 5***

*When considering the examination outcome the examiners may use the following non-exhaustive list as a guide to the different categories.*

## *Minor corrections and modifications:*

* *typographical errors*
* *correcting references / diagrams*
* *editorial corrections*
* *clarifying points and / or providing additional explanatory information*
* *rephrasing/adjustments of grammar or style in specific sentences or paragraphs*
* *replacement of, or additions to, specific text, references or diagrams*
* *other corrections that do not require major re-working or re-interpretation of the intellectual content of the dissertation.*

## *Substantial amendments:*

* *the addition of more substantial material / clarifying or amplifying the argument*
* *rewriting of larger passages etc. / adjustments of grammar or style in one or more whole chapters*
* *more extensive editorial changes*
* *typographical errors where these are so numerous as to distract the reader's attention from the argument of the dissertation.*

## *Major Revision, resubmission and re-examination:*

* *any specified amendments sufficient to bring the thesis up to a standard that satisfies the criteria for the award of the degree*
* *major alterations in structure or argument on intellectual or presentational grounds,*
* *revision and re-ordering of chapters*
* *revision that requires additional/further research*
1. These should not normally exceed 150 words [↑](#footnote-ref-1)