



# **Policy and guidance for aegrotat and posthumous research degrees awards**

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This policy is applicable to the following full time and part time postgraduate research degree programmes at The Open University (including those registered through an Affiliated Research Centre (ARC)):

- Master of Philosophy (MPhil)
- Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
- Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) by distance learning
- Professional Doctorate in Education (EdD)
- Professional Doctorate in Health and Social Care (DHSC)

The policy comes into effect in the event of the diagnosis of a terminal or debilitating illness, severely deteriorating disability, or death of a postgraduate research student prior to the completion of their research degree.

## **1. Academic considerations**

Consideration of requests for Aegrotat and Posthumous examinations will take into account the student's progress towards their thesis and whether the amount of work submitted is sufficient in volume and substance to demonstrate readiness for assessment.

Recommendations for Aegrotat or Posthumous awards will be made by an appointed team of examiners who will examine the body of work and make a recommendation as to whether the degree should be awarded to the Research Degrees Examination Result Approval Committee for final approval.

Research Degrees awarded under this policy will be identified as such both on the certificate and the completion letter.

## **2. Aegrotat awards**

Aegrotat awards may be considered in cases when a student cannot complete their degree due to serious (terminal or debilitating) illness or disability.

### **2.1 Eligibility**

To be eligible for consideration of an Aegrotat award, students should be currently on a Research Degree programme and:

- (a) have either successfully completed upgrade (PhD programmes) or the Year 2 Summative (Professional Doctorate programmes); and
- (b) have evidence that they have met, or be on the trajectory to meet, the learning outcomes as described in either Appendix 1a (MPhil) or Appendix 1b (Doctoral award) of Research Degrees Regulations; and
- (c) have been prevented for medical reasons from submitting the thesis, undertaking a viva, modifying the thesis or resubmitting the thesis and be unlikely to be able to resume study at a later date.

### **2.2 Implications of Aegrotat awards**

The award of an Aegrotat degree is final and examined work cannot be used towards any subsequent research degree.

An Aegrotat award may only count towards the qualification for which it was awarded.

An Aegrotat award ends the student's registration and there will not be the opportunity for future reassessment.

## 2.3 How to request an Aegrotat examination

If the student or their supervisor wishes to request an examination for an Aegrotat award they should [contact the Research Degrees Management team](#) in the first instance.

Supervisors should only request an Aegrotat examination once they have obtained the written consent of the student, or their next of kin if the student is unable to provide written consent.

Medical evidence that supports a decision to examine *in absentia* will be required.

## 2.4 Aegrotat examination process by stage

Different examination processes will be effective depending on the stage the candidate had reached prior to being unable to complete their degree.

### **Study interrupted prior to thesis submission**

Where possible, the candidate is responsible, for presenting their work for examination in an appropriate format. Where their health precludes this, the Supervisory team will be responsible for collating and presenting the candidate's work.

The submission portfolio should contain at least the following (this list is not exhaustive):

- A covering letter/statement from the supervisor outlining the stage that student had reached and clearly confirming that the work submitted is the candidate's own work, including reference to any

use of Generative AI either for proof reading or research methodology;

- A title page indicating that the work was submitted for consideration for an Aegrotat award;
- An abstract and table of contents;
- Any available draft thesis chapters or sections;
- Any published and other work deemed appropriate for submission – this may include papers submitted for conferences, published articles or work prepared for presentation at departmental meetings;
- Research outputs such as sequences of code, software, data sets, recordings of exhibitions or performances or other research outputs generated by the PGR in the course of their research.

The portfolio of work should be scrutinised by the faculty Director of Research Degrees (DRD). Together the supervisory team and DRD must be satisfied that there is sufficient quantity and quality of work, to enable an academic judgement on whether the standard for the award of the research degree has been achieved.

The recommended portfolio of work should be submitted to Progress Board via the Research-Degrees-[Faculty] mailbox by the DRD.

Following a recommendation from the DRD that the candidate's work is of examinable standard, an examination panel will be convened, comprising a Chair, an internal examiner and an external examiner as required by the

relevant sections of the [Research Degrees Regulations](#) (Appointment of the Examination Panel).

The examiners will take a holistic view of a student's study performance on all completed and partially completed aspects of the research degree. They will be asked to write a report and recommendation to the Research Degrees Examination Result Approval Committee on the basis of the written submission alone. The examiners will be asked to scrutinise the thesis submission and to reach a view on whether the standard for the award of the research degree has been achieved and provide a report to the Research Degrees Examination Result Approval Committee which must contain full information on whether the criteria for the award of the particular research degree have been met. The examiners may meet with, or request further information from, the Supervisors if needed prior to making a recommendation to the Research Degrees Examination Result Approval Committee.

### **Study interrupted after submission but before the viva**

In cases where the thesis has been submitted but has not yet been examined, the exam panel must be nominated in accordance with the [Research Degrees Regulations](#). Given the nature of the examination, the Chair and Examiners should all be independently experienced and able to reach an informed judgement about whether the thesis reaches the required standards.

The exam panel will be asked to scrutinise the submitted thesis and to reach a view on whether the standard for the award of the research degree has been achieved on the basis of the written thesis alone. The panel will provide a report to the Research Degrees Examination Result Approval Committee which must

contain full information on whether the criteria for the award of the particular research degree have been met. The exam panel may meet with, or request further information from, the Supervisors if needed prior to making a recommendation to the Research Degrees Examination Result Approval Committee.

### **Study interrupted after the viva but before submission of minor or major corrections**

Where a thesis has already been examined and a viva has already taken place the examiners will be asked to submit their original report and recommendation to the Research Degrees Examination Result Approval Committee on the basis of the thesis and performance at the viva. The Committee may consult with the exam panel where required.

### **Study interrupted after the viva but before resubmission**

Where a thesis has already been examined and a viva has already taken place the supervisors will be asked to submit any additional/revised work (in addition to the original thesis) that is available for resubmission. The supervisor/s and DRD must be satisfied that there is sufficient quantity and quality of new or revised/updated work, to enable an academic judgement on the award of a degree. The Research Degrees Examination Result Approval Committee may consult with the exam panel to determine whether the award of a lower degree (e.g. MPhil) is warranted.

## **2.5 Aegrotat examination outcomes**

The following outcomes are possible for an Aegrotat Award:

- (a) **PhD/EdD/DHSC (as appropriate):** This will be awarded where sufficient evidence is shown of attainment or trajectory towards the learning outcomes for such an award in Appendix 1B of the [Research Degrees Regulations](#)
- (b) **MPhil:** This may be awarded where the submitted evidence falls short of what is required for a doctoral degree but where sufficient evidence is shown of attainment or trajectory towards the learning outcomes for such an award in Appendix 1A of the [Research Degrees Regulations](#)
- (c) **No award:** Where the submitted evidence is insufficient to merit the award of a degree. In such cases a Certificate of Research Engagement may be awarded

The timeframe from receipt of supporting evidence for a final decision to be reached will normally be 12-14 weeks. The supervisor who has presented the case will be kept updated of progress and will contact the student or their next of kin as appropriate.

Where time is a critical factor, for instance if the student is receiving end-of-life care, every effort will be made to expedite the case.

The panel's recommendation will be put to the Research Degrees Examination Result Approval Committee for final approval.

### 3. Posthumous awards

Posthumous awards may be considered in the event of the death of a postgraduate research student.

#### 3.1 Posthumous examination eligibility criteria

To be eligible for consideration of a Posthumous award, the student should:

- (a) Have been registered on a Research Degree programme at the time of their death or who withdrew no more than one year prior to their death due to a related medical condition; and
- (b) have either successfully completed upgrade (PhD programmes) or the Year 2 Summative (Professional Doctorate programmes); and
- (c) have accumulated evidence that they would have met, or had been on a trajectory to meet, the learning outcomes as described in either Appendix 1A (MPhil) or Appendix 1B (Doctoral award) of the [Research Degrees Regulations](#)

#### 3.2 How to request a Posthumous examination

If the supervisors or their next of kin wishes to request an examination for a Posthumous award they should [contact the Research Degrees Management team](#).

Supervisors should only request a Posthumous examination once they have obtained the written consent of the student's next of kin.

A death certificate will be required.

### **3.3 Posthumous examination process by stage**

Different examination processes will be effective depending on the stage the candidate had reached prior to being unable to complete their degree.

#### **Study curtailed prior to thesis submission**

The Supervisory team is responsible for collating and presenting the candidate's work in an appropriate format.

A submission portfolio for a Posthumous award in cases where the candidate has not yet completed their thesis should contain at least the following (this list is not exhaustive):

- A covering letter/statement from the supervisor outlining the stage that student had reached and clearly confirming that the work submitted is the candidate's own work; including reference to any use of Generative AI either for proof reading or research methodology
- A title page indicating that the work was submitted for consideration for a Posthumous award;
- An abstract and table of contents;
- Any available draft thesis chapters or sections;
- Any published and other work deemed appropriate for submission – this may include papers submitted for conferences, published articles or work prepared for presentation at departmental meetings;

- Research outputs such as sequences of code, software, data sets, recordings of exhibitions or performances or other research outputs generated by the PGR in the course of their research.

The portfolio of work should be scrutinised by the faculty Director of Research Degrees (DRD). Together the supervisory team and DRD must be satisfied that there is sufficient quantity and quality of work, to enable an academic judgement on whether the standard for the award of the research degree has been achieved.

The recommended portfolio of work should be submitted to Progress Board via the Research-Degrees-[Faculty] mailbox.

Following a recommendation from the DRD that the candidate's work is of examinable standard, an examination panel will be convened, comprising a Chair, an internal examiner and an external examiner as required by the relevant sections of the [Research Degrees Regulations](#) (Appointment of the Examination Panel).

The examiners will take a holistic view of a student's study performance on all completed and partially completed aspects of the research degree. They will be asked to write a report and recommendation to the Research Degrees Examination Result Approval Committee on the basis of the written submission alone. The examiners will be asked to scrutinise the thesis submission and to reach a view on whether the standard for the award of the research degree has been achieved and provide a report to the Research Degrees Examination Result Approval Committee which must contain full information on whether the

criteria for the award of the particular research degree have been met. The examiners may meet with, or request further information from, the Supervisors if needed prior to making a recommendation to the Research Degrees Examination Result Approval Committee.

### **Study curtailed after thesis submission but before the viva**

In cases where the thesis has been submitted but has not yet examined, the exam panel must be nominated in accordance with the [Research Degrees Regulations](#). Given the nature of the examination, the Chair and Examiners should all be independently experienced and able to reach an informed judgement about whether the thesis reaches the required standards.

The exam panel will be asked to scrutinise the submitted thesis and to reach a view on whether the standard for the award of the research degree has been achieved on the basis of the written thesis alone. The panel will provide a report to the Research Degrees Examination Result Approval Committee which must contain full information on whether the criteria for the award of the particular research degree have been met. The exam panel may meet with, or request further information from, the Supervisors if needed prior to making a recommendation to the Research Degrees Examination Result Approval Committee.

### **Study curtailed after the viva but before thesis submission of minor or major corrections**

Where a thesis has already been examined and a viva has already taken place

the examiners will be asked to submit their original report and recommendation to the Research Degrees Examination Result Approval Committee on the basis of the thesis and performance at the viva. The Committee may consult with the exam panel where required.

### **Study curtailed after the viva but before resubmission**

Where a thesis has already been examined and a viva has already taken place) the supervisors will be asked to submit any additional/revised work (in addition to the original thesis) that is available for resubmission. The supervisor/s and DRD must be satisfied that there is sufficient quantity and quality of new or revised/updated work, to enable an academic judgement on the award of a degree. The Research Degrees Examination Result Approval Committee may consult with the exam panel to determine whether the award of a lower degree (e.g. MPhil) is warranted.

## **3.5 Posthumous examination outcomes**

The following outcomes are possible for a Posthumous Award:

- (a) **PhD/EdD/DHSC (as appropriate):** This will be awarded where sufficient evidence is shown of attainment or trajectory towards the learning outcomes for such an award in Appendix 1B of the [Research Degrees Regulations](#)
- (b) **MPhil:** This may be awarded where the submitted evidence falls short of what is required for a doctoral degree, but where sufficient evidence is shown of attainment or trajectory towards the learning outcomes for such an award in Appendix 1A of the [Research Degrees Regulations](#)

- (c) **No award:** Where the submitted evidence is insufficient to merit the award of a degree. In such cases a Certificate of Research Engagement may be awarded

The timeframe from receipt of supporting evidence for a final decision to be reached will normally be 12-14 weeks. The supervisor who has presented the case will be kept updated of progress and will contact the student's next of kin.

The panel's recommendation will be put to the Research Degrees Examination Result Approval Committee for final approval.

## **Appendix 1: Additional useful information**

- [Research Degrees Regulations](#)

If you have any queries or require advice relating to this policy, please contact the Graduate School on [by email](#) or phone **01908 653806**.

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