University of Essex

Code of Practice: Postgraduate Research Degrees

2024-25

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Code of Practice: Postgraduate Research Degrees 2024-25

This document is a broad statement of University requirements covering departments' and supervisors' responsibilities. Students' responsibilities are outlined in the PGR student handbooks. This Code of Practice should be read in conjunction with the University Regulations. The 'Dean' refers to the Executive Dean (or their deputy) or Dean of Partnerships (or their deputy). In practice, most decisions are referred to the Faculty Dean (Postgraduate Research Education) through the Postgraduate Research Education Team.

As a holder of a Student Sponsor License, the University is required to implement Home Office immigration rules that are subject to change at any point during the year. Where immigration rules affect programmes of study the Immigration Policy Group, chaired by the Academic Registrar, will, through the International Services Team, inform academic departments of any new requirements and will communicate the changes to affected students. On occasion Home Office changes may necessitate an 'in year' amendment to the Code of Practice.

Students at Partner Institutions should note that in some cases additional local policies and procedures apply.

1. Departments' Responsibilities

Each Department, School or Centre with research students should:

1.1 Postgraduate Research Director

Designate a Postgraduate Research Director, or equivalent, who is an experienced research student supervisor. The Postgraduate Research Director will be responsible to the Head of Department (HoD) for the departmental arrangements for PGR supervision and for liaising with and reporting as necessary to the Dean.

1.2 Departmental arrangements

Ensure that on acceptance of an offer of admission (that is normally well before registration) all new research students are supplied with the departmental arrangements for research students. The departmental documentation and the arrangements it describes should be appropriate for the degree programme concerned (ie there will be some variations depending on whether the student is registered for a PhD or a Masters degree by research) and should be approved by the Dean.

1.3 Student induction

Ensure that all new research students are provided with, and are strongly encouraged to participate in, an induction programme at the start of their period of study (see section 3 below). During the induction, or within the first three weeks of term, the Postgraduate Research Director should discuss the details contained in this Code of Practice, the PGR student handbook, including departmental academic milestones, and the departmental arrangements relating to them. Students should be given information about expectations and conventions regarding referencing and citations, and be advised about the University's policy on plagiarism and academic offences. Students should be required to sign that they have read and understood the documentation.

1.4 Supervisors

Ensure that appropriate supervisory arrangements are in place for all research students. Each student must have at least one supervisor who is engaged in research activity and has relevant publications. Where two supervisors are appointed, one supervisor must be nominated as the lead/primary supervisor who will be the first point of contact for the student, and responsible for record keeping and providing reports. We encourage that co-supervision arrangements are put in place in cases where a supervisor has not previously supervised a PhD student through to completion. However, where a member of staff who has not previously supervised any PGR student through to completion is appointed as sole supervisor, support must be provided through the department's normal mentoring arrangements as well as through the Supervisory Panel (see section 4 below). Honorary and/or visiting staff cannot be appointed as a supervisor of a PGR student. Supervisors should remain well informed and up to date on all PGR policy and practice; for example through the Supervisory Good Practice Guide.

1.5 Replacement supervisors

Ensure that adequate arrangements are made for supervision when any supervisor either leaves the University, or is on an extended period of leave (for example a form of parental leave or sabbatical) and is not carrying on with supervision during this period. Any changes in supervision must be approved by the Postgraduate Research Director. Any permanent changes, as well as arrangements for replacement supervision where a member of staff is on leave, must also be reported to the Postgraduate Research Education Team as soon as possible or on the relevant termly progress lists.

1.6 List of supervisors

Keep an up-to-date record of all research students and their supervisors and make this available to the Postgraduate Research Education Team on request.

1.7 Supervision and the frequency of supervisory meetings

Agree suitable norms regarding the frequency of formal supervisory meetings between students and supervisors and ensure they are followed by supervisors. These will probably vary according to the discipline and the stage that the student has reached. However, students and supervisors are required to communicate, whether face-to-face or by electronic means, to engage in discussion/review of the student's work and progress at least once a month (bi-monthly for part-time students). For students with immigration sponsorship the majority of contact should be face-to-face, in exceptional circumstances the University may agree that contact can be via video link. Departments may also wish to specify or recommend the duration of contact. These norms should be included in the written documentation supplied to students and supervisors. Supervision should normally be provided until the student has submitted a final version of their thesis for the award of their degree, including any referral period or to complete corrections.

A record of supervisory meetings/communications should be kept in accordance with the *Progress and Appeals Procedures for Research Degree Students* (.pdf).

1.8 Supervisory Panel

Ensure that a Supervisory Panel involving the supervisor(s) and at least one member of staff who is not the student's supervisor is held at least twice a year for each full-time student and once a year for part-time students and should normally be held face-to-face. If a student or supervisor is away from the University in the period when the panel is due, the panel should be held by video-link.

1.9 Time allocation for supervision

Ensure adequate academic staff time is allocated for the supervision of each research student as part of the department's workload allocation model. There can be some flexibility in these arrangements, for example, time allocations might vary according to the stage the student has reached and whether they are studying away from the University.

1.10 Problems with supervision

Have a clear and well-publicised procedure that enables students to raise problems regarding their supervisory arrangements. Students should be encouraged to raise problems with their supervisor in the first instance. However, departments should make it clear that students have the right to discuss supervisory problems with a member of staff who is not involved in their supervision, such as the chair of the Research Students' Progress Board (RSPB), the Postgraduate Research Director or HoD. Students should also be told that if they feel unable to approach a member of the department they are free to contact the Dean or the Postgraduate Research Education Team. Discussions about problems with supervision should remain confidential if the student requests this. Students may request a change of supervisor. The chair of the RSPB should consider these requests and accommodate them where practicable, noting that it may not always be possible for suitable alternative arrangements to be made.

1.11 Submission deadlines and standard and completion Periods

Ensure that students understand the University regulations on thesis submission deadlines. Students should aim to submit their thesis during the last term of their standard period (three years full-time). Students permitted to enter a completion period at the end of their standard period do so on the understanding that their full thesis will be ready for submission by the end of that completion period. The standard period of study may be reduced in exceptional circumstances, up to a maximum of three terms full-time) if the student is ready to submit their thesis, with the Dean's approval.

1.12 Progress guidelines

Provide guidelines for students regarding the volume and standard of work to be expected at the end of each year of their studies and for confirmation using a milestones document. The milestones document should be included in the PGR Student Handbook supplied to students and supervisors. Students undertaking Practice as Research (PaR) should have the _Policy for Postgraduate Research Degrees involving Practice as Research_ brought to their attention. It should be made clear that progress from one year to the next, confirmation of PhD status and progress into the completion period, will depend on satisfactory achievement of the necessary work and attainment of published milestones.

1.13 Research Students' Progress Board

Ensure that a Research Students' Progress Board (RSPB) is held at least twice a year to review the progress of all research students and report this to the Postgraduate Research Education Team. The first meeting should be held between December and mid-January (in certain circumstances, depending on a student's term of admission for example, it may be appropriate for this to take place in April). The second meeting should be held in the summer term before the end of June. If the RSPB requires a third meeting (for example to review the progress of particular students) this should be held in September (see section 5 below).

1.14 Reports on students' progress

Ensure that an individual report on each student's progress is available to the Dean by uploading the report to the electronic student file at the end of each year of their study and at the point of confirmation of PhD status. This should indicate the state of the research and the amount of work that has been carried out, as well as a recommendation from the RSPB as to whether the student be allowed to progress to the following year and/or whether a downgrading, upgrading, confirmation of PhD status or discontinuation is recommended. Where a student has immigration sponsorship the supervisor will be asked to provide monthly confirmation of their contact with the student.

1.15 Staff induction and training

Ensure that all new members of staff who may become research student supervisors are seen by the Postgraduate Research Director to discuss the University Code of Practice and that all supervisors are

supplied with a copy of the Department's supervisory arrangements every year. The Department should also ensure that less experienced members of staff who have not supervised a PhD through to completion attend the relevant University's training for research student supervisors. The Department should ensure that opportunities for sharing good practice in supervision are included in the departmental and central arrangements for training and support provided to all academic staff, including any mentoring provision.

1.16 Academic networking

Ensure that research students are advised of the importance of making contact with other researchers in the field and of presenting their work to academic audiences. This should include advising them on the opportunities to present work to staff and fellow postgraduates and about attendance and participation in appropriate seminars and conferences.

1.17 Facilities

Ensure that during the standard period all research students have access to the departmental facilities and equipment (or online equivalent) necessary to enable them to complete their research degree successfully.

1.18 Student feedback

Ensure that student feedback is collected and reviewed in accordance with the University's _Student Representative Policy_. A summary of the feedback and, where appropriate, details of any follow-up should be provided to the Dean on an annual basis for consideration by the autumn term Education Committee.

1.19 External supervisors

Where an external supervisor is appointed (ie an Associate Supervisor), ensure that they receive a copy of the University Code of Practice and complies with its requirements.

2. Supervisors' Responsibilities

Supervisors have a responsibility to:

2.1 Regulations, Code of Practice and guidelines

Familiarise themselves with the University regulations for research degrees and associated policies, this Code of Practice, Supervisory Good Practice Guide, and the departmental supervisory arrangements.

2.2 Regular meetings

Maintain regular contact with the student with at least monthly meetings (pro-rata for part-time students) until the thesis has been submitted and, if this arises, during any referral period and corrections. In the case of distance learning students, supervisors must maintain regular contact with the student through electronic and/or other means.

It is particularly important when supervising a student with immigration sponsorship to ensure that the majority of contact is face-to-face and that where this is not possible a record is kept on the student's file confirming the arrangements that have been agreed in the absence of face-to-face contact.

2.3 Research guidance

Provide guidance about the nature and standard of research work expected, including advice on attaining that standard, together with advice on academic practice in the discipline, matters of research design, ethical issues, and appropriate health and safety issues. Supervisors should make it clear to each research student that it is possible for the research and writing up to be completed within the standard period and provide guidance on the appropriate volume of research work for the degree in question. They should also assist each research student in developing a clear timetable of work and emphasise the importance of keeping to it.

2.4 Written work, oral presentations and feedback

Request written work and oral presentations as appropriate and comment on such work within a reasonable time.

2.5 Academic Offences

Supervisors must encourage their students to read the _Academic Offences Policy_ (.pdf). Supervisors are encouraged to conduct formative exercises to run student's work through plagiarism detection software in their first term of study.

The University reserves the right to use all legitimate means at its disposal to detect instances of plagiarism.

2.6 Accessibility, leave and supervisory changes

Be reasonably accessible to students and advise them of any lengthy absences which will change the routine of monthly meetings. Keep each student well informed in advance about any prospective periods of leave and the planned supervisory arrangements during the leave.

2.7 Update knowledge and skills

Ensure that their knowledge and skills are as up-to-date as possible. Less experienced supervisors who have not supervised a PhD through to completion must attend the University's course on supervising research degrees and will be provided with a mentor (see 1.4 above). Experienced supervisors must complete refresher training in accordance with University requirements.

2.8 Research training

Identify and record the student's training needs at the beginning of their studies and review them on a regular basis and at least every Supervisory Panel. Ensure that the student has opportunities to develop appropriate generic and research skills and that a record of course/workshop completion and attendance is kept. This may be in the form of a copy of a record maintained by the student that has been signed off by the supervisor. Keep up to date with courses available through Proficio and encourage the student to book onto relevant training.

2.9 Records of meetings and written work

Keep a record of dates of formal supervisions with the student and of written work submitted, including the feedback and when it was provided, which can be produced later if necessary.

In addition, when supervising a student with immigration sponsorship provide monthly confirmation, via the appropriate proforma, of contact with the student.

2.10 Supervisory Panels (see section 4 below)

Ensure that meetings of the Supervisory Panel are arranged for each student in accordance with the requirements set out in paragraph 4.2.

2.11 Submit reports

Report on each student's progress to the Supervisory Panel indicating what has been achieved, advising the panel where they believe that the student is unlikely to reach the standard for the degree for which s/he is registered or where progress is slow, and ensure that the chair of the panel forwards a report on the panel to the Postgraduate Research Director in time for the next RSPB meeting.

2.12 Advising student on progress

Warn and advise students in writing, with a copy to the Postgraduate Research Director, where work is not of the appropriate standard or is being produced too slowly, and of steps that might be taken to remedy the situation.

2.13 Employment

Where appropriate, encourage students to think about their subsequent employment, and possible future career trajectories, and direct the student to suitable sources of training, advice and support.

2.14 Preparation for examination of the research thesis

Ensure that students understand the requirements of the degree and any requirements relating to the agreed thesis format, provide guidance on the examination process, help students to prepare for the viva, and direct the student to appropriate training.

2.15 Approval of title

The supervisor and HoD are responsible for approving the proposed title for the thesis, which indicates that the thesis is close to submission. The Approval of Title form (.docx) should be submitted to the Postgraduate Research Education Team at least three months prior to submission in order for the appointment of the examiners process to start.

2.16 Appointment of examiners for the research thesis

Nominate examiners for a candidate's thesis.

2.17 Thesis examination

The supervisor should not normally be present during the viva but is encouraged to be in the department on the day to support the candidate at the conclusion of the viva. With the permission of the candidate and the examiners, the supervisor is permitted to be present when the examiners inform the candidate of the result of the viva.

2.18 UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTP), Centres for Doctoral Training (CDT) and Project-linked studentships

Supervisors of students funded by UKRI Research Councils, such as through DTPs, CDTs or Project-linked studentships, may be required to meet additional expectations in all areas of supervision and reporting depending on the conditions of the UKRI award.

3. Student Induction

3.1 Information

Departments should provide research students with the following information as soon as possible after they accept their offer and no later than the end of the second week of their first term:

- general information about the University and its postgraduate portfolio in the relevant subject(s)

- the University's regulations and procedures for research degrees

- the names and contact details of the student's supervisor(s) and information about supervisory arrangements

- general information about student support and welfare services

- a summary of the facilities that will be made available to the student

- relevant health and safety and other legislative information

3.2 Induction

Under normal circumstances, departments should strongly encourage students to attend the PGR Welcome Day which includes university-wide, faculty and departmental level induction events. The day will cover:

- the University's and the students' responsibilities as set out in this Code of Practice and the PGR Student Handbook, and Departmental/Course Milestones

- the challenges that will typically face research students during the course of their studies and where guidance may be sought in the event of difficulties

- progress, confirmation and completion procedures and requirements

- the University's research ethics and codes and those of relevant professional bodies and discipline groups

- issues concerning authorship, plagiarism, intellectual property and data protection

- details about opportunities and requirements for skills development

- opportunities for careers advice and preparing for post-graduation

- opportunities for postgraduates to be represented on departmental student liaison committees and the Education Committee

- opportunities for interdisciplinary activities; and

- departmental policies on funding attendance at conferences

Students who are unable to attend the PGR Welcome Day because they register after the beginning of the academic year, are distance learning research students, or for exceptional reasons are unable to participate in their induction in person, will be provided with a web-based alternative.

4. Supervisory Panels

4.1 Composition

Usually as a minimum, Supervisory Panels should comprise of the student, at least one supervisor (or in exceptional circumstances where the supervisor is on leave, an acting supervisor may attend) and one other academic as Chair. Where the supervisor is a less experienced member of staff who has not supervised a student through to completion, the chair must be an experienced supervisor. Honorary staff members may also sit on the Panel, in addition to the members listed previously. The Chair of the Supervisory Panel should not:

- be a partner or a close relative of the supervisor (main, joint or secondary), or

- have a professional or personal relationship with the student that might give rise to a conflict of interest

4.2 Timetabling and frequency of meetings

Supervisors should ensure that Supervisory Panels are arranged at least twice a year for full-time students and once a year for part-time students and students in a referral period (referral for re-examination) until they have submitted their thesis. It is standard practice for these meetings to take place in person, however, if all Supervisory Panel members agree, Panels can be held virtually video or telephone conferencing (such as Zoom. Virtual meetings must not breach progress monitoring requirements for students subject to immigration control.

There is no general requirement for Distance Learning students to attend face-to-face Supervisory Panels and they may have all Supervisory Panels held via Zoom if deemed more appropriate. If a department wishes to specify face-to-face Supervisory Panels or other 'on campus' activities for a Distance Learning student, then this must be done when the details of arrangements are sent to the Dean for approval under Regulation 4.5.

4.3 Advice, monitoring and reports

The purpose of Supervisory Panels is to provide the student with a wider range of advice on their research and to provide an opportunity to reflect on the student's progress including assessment of training needs, assessment of progress against the published progress milestones and a discussion about the agreed thesis format (i.e. whether undertaking a thesis by papers (.pdf) or traditional thesis format). For students undertaking PaR, an individual set of Milestones will be developed and agreed, in

line with the _Policy for Postgraduate Research degrees involving Practice as Research_. It is also the role of the chair of the panel to prepare a formal report on the student's progress for the Postgraduate Research Director and/or the RSPB. At each meeting, the Supervisory Panel should receive a written report from the student on progress and a future work schedule as well as oral or written comments on the student's progress from the supervisor. The Supervisory Panel may also receive a formal report of extenuating circumstances from the student, which should be considered by the panel and included in the report to the RSPB. At the end of the meeting, the chair should complete a report of the panel, including any recommendations made, which should subsequently be seen and acknowledged by the supervisor and the student. If there is concern about the student's progress, this must be indicated clearly in the chair's report. A copy of the report should then be forwarded to the Postgraduate Research Director, along with the student's report, for consideration at the next RSPB meeting.

In the event a student does not engage with the Supervisory Panel process, the Supervisory Panel will make a recommendation to the Research Student Progress Board in their absence, based on the information available to them.

4.4 Confirmation of PhD status and completion

All PhD students are initially registered as MPhil/PhD and must be confirmed as an MPhil or PhD student at the following times:

4.4.1 Students in the Faculties of Arts and Humanities and Social Sciences

By the end of the first year, for full-time PhD students (or equivalent for part-time students) a Supervisory Panel shall be held to consider a student's progress with MPhil/PhD registration against the departmental criteria for the confirmation of PhD status, and will make a recommendation to the RSPB.

4.4.2 Students in the Faculty of Science and Health

By the end of the first term of the second year for full-time PhD students (or equivalent for part-time students) a Supervisory Panel shall be held to consider a student's progress with MPhil/PhD registration against the departmental criteria for the confirmation of PhD status, and will make a recommendation to the RSPB.

4.4.3 For all research students

If the Supervisory Panel is satisfied that a student has produced work of sufficient quality and quantity to provide evidence of appropriate PhD-level progress and agreed milestones for confirmation had been met, a recommendation should be made to the RSPB that PhD status should be confirmed. If PhD status is not confirmed at the meeting, the case will be reconsidered at the next Supervisory Panel meeting on one further occasion in the following term (pro rata for part time students).

If a student has not submitted their thesis within the standard period, a Supervisory Panel shall be held at the end of a student's standard period to consider whether they should be permitted to move into completion and will make a recommendation to the RSPB.

4.5 Panel membership and internal examining

No member of staff who has been a member of a Supervisory Panel during the final six months before submission of the thesis may be nominated as the internal examiner.

5. Research Students' Progress Board

5.1 Composition and role

The Postgraduate Research Students' Progress Board (RSPB), to be established by each department, should be chaired by the Postgraduate Research Director or HoD, and should include at least two other experienced supervisors. The Chair of the Research Student Progress Board should not:

- be a partner or a close relative of the supervisor (main, joint or secondary), or

- have a professional or personal relationship with the student that might give rise to a conflict of interest

The RSPB should review the progress of every research student through to the award of a degree, withdrawal or failure, on the basis of the reports from the Supervisory Panel, including the written report from the student and any submission of extenuating circumstances. Students registered on a Practice as Research Degree should review the _Policy for Postgraduate Research Degrees involving Practice as Research_ for more details regarding progress monitoring. Where no Supervisory Panel has taken place, for instance because a student is carrying out research abroad with limited access to the internet, the supervisor and the student must each submit a progress report. A decision/recommendation for discontinuation, downgrading or upgrading, or to confirm PhD status or change to MPhil, to permit entry into completion, or to extend the standard period can only be made by the RSPB (see section 5.4 to 5.8). Where the RSPB is considering a recommendation from a student's Supervisory Panel of discontinuation or downgrading, or at confirmation to change a student's status to MPhil, the RSPB membership must include at least two members who were not on the student's last Supervisory Panel. Smaller departments may want to co-opt a supervisor from another department in a cognate discipline as a member of the RSPB if the department finds it difficult to satisfy this requirement.

5.2 Frequency and timing

There should be at least two formal reviews of research students' progress each year, one held mid-year in December/January and one in June. Any review that recommends progression to the next year, confirmation of PhD status or to change to MPhil, entry into the completion period and any recommendation for discontinuation, or downgrading or upgrading should normally take the form of a face-to-face meeting of the RSPB. Any other review may take the form of a meeting of the RSPB on the basis of the written reports from Supervisory Panels.

An additional meeting of the RSPB may be required in September to consider any outstanding progress decisions which need to be made before the start of the new academic year.

5.3 Taught course requirements

For students on a research degree programme that includes compulsory taught course requirements, as part of the consideration of students' progress, the RSPB shall receive a copy of the recommendations from the appropriate Board of Examiners meeting, including the approved marks.

5.4 Reports and recommendations to the Dean

The RSPB will report its decisions/recommendations on each student to the Postgraduate Research Education Team at least annually as follows:

■ a list of the decisions on students who have been allowed to proceed with their studies either unconditionally or subject to further review at a specified date if appropriate

■ a list of the decisions on those MPhil/PhD students whose status should be confirmed as PhD

■ a list of the decisions on those students who have been permitted to move into completion

■ a copy of the individual proposed Milestones for PaR degree students

■ a list of the decisions on those Masters by Dissertation students who have been upgraded to MPhil or MPhil/PhD, and those MPhil students who have been upgraded to MPhil/PhD

■ individual reports on students where the recommendation to the Dean is: change of status for a student for the degree of MPhil, MPhil/PhD or PhD to either the degree of MPhil or of Masters by Dissertation; extension to the standard period; discontinuation; or permission to move into further completion (only applies to students admitted before October 2008)

■ in cases where replacement supervisors are appointed, or a change of supervisor has taken place, this should also be reported to the Postgraduate Research Education Team via a Progress List

In all cases, a copy of the Supervisory Panel report on each student shall be uploaded to the students electronic student file.

5.5 Downgrading or discontinuation

If the RSPB is minded to make a recommendation that a student's status be downgraded or studies discontinued, the student must be offered an opportunity to discuss this with the RSPB before the final recommendation is forwarded to the Dean and if appropriate to present evidence about any extenuating circumstances. The student should be invited to meet with the RSPB, or the Chair of the RSPB, in advance of the formal recommendation being made to the Dean. If downgrading or discontinuation is confirmed by the RSPB and the Dean, the student may then request a review of the recommendation (see *Progress and Appeals Procedures for Research Degree Students* (.pdf). The Board should in all

cases inform the student in writing of the Board's recommendation and of the opportunity to appeal, following the Dean's approval of the decision.

5.6 Mid-year recommendations and special meetings

The RSPB can recommend discontinuation, downgrading or upgrading at any point in the academic year and special meetings can be convened at any time. Upgrading can only take place in the standard period while discontinuation and downgrading can take place at any time prior to the submission of the thesis.

5.7 Extension to standard period

The RSPB can recommend an extension to a student's standard period of up to one term, if it is deemed the student has not met the milestone requirements to enter a completion period. The request should include a detailed explanation of the expected work to be undertaken within the extended period. In such instances, the subsequent number of completion periods available to the student will be reduced by one term, unless exceptional circumstances result in the reduction not to be appropriate. Students must be offered an opportunity to discuss this with the RSPB before the final recommendation is forwarded to the Dean for approval. In exceptional circumstances an extension of more than one term may be granted, and will be considered on a case by case basis.

5.8 Requests for further information from the Dean

The Dean may request further information on any student and discuss their progress with the student, supervisor, Postgraduate Research Director or HoD as necessary. The Dean may require the departmental RSPB to reconsider the situation of any student, and its progress decisions, where this seems necessary. In cases where the student(s) concerned is supervised by the Dean, or they serve on the Supervisory Panel, the Dean shall arrange for another Dean to act in any circumstances that depart from normal expectations.

6. Assessment

6.1 Nomination and appointment of examiners

When a student submits their Approval of Title form (.docx), the department will be asked to nominate two examiners: one internal and one external, whose names have to be approved and appointed by the Dean.

When a student has been referred and one or more of the appointed examiners is no longer able to examine the student (for reasons such as leaving the university, relocation or death) the department will nominate an appropriate examiner for the consideration of the Dean, to take over the examination process and the examination will continue to schedule. Departments can seek approval for reasonable adjustments from the Dean.

6.2 Staff candidates

In the case of staff candidates the department must nominate two external examiners, whom will be approved and appointed by the Dean.

6.3 Eligibility to be an internal examiner

The internal examiner for a research degree should be:
- a member of the academic or research staff of the University or Partner Institution (visiting staff cannot be appointed as an Internal Examiner)

- research active with appropriate expertise

- normally have a degree, or equivalent, at the level at which they are being appointed to examine (if not a case as to their suitability needs to be made). A Professor with appropriate publications would be considered to be 'equivalent' and a case would not need to be made

The internal examiner should not:
- have been the student's supervisor (main, joint or secondary) other than acting as a temporary supervisor for a period of up to a year but not in the final 12 months before submission of the thesis

- have been a member of the Supervisory Panel during the final six months before submission of the thesis

- have a professional or personal relationship with the student, supervisor, or the external examiner that might give rise to a conflict of interest

- be the partner or a close relative of the supervisor (main, joint or secondary)

6.4 Eligibility to be an external examiner

The external examiner for a research degree should be:
- research active with appropriate expertise

- normally employed in Higher Education or a Research Institute (if not, including Emeritus Professors, a case as to their suitability needs to be made)

- a senior member of staff with relevant examination experience (if not, a senior and experienced internal examiner must be appointed)

- qualified to the level at which they are being appointed to examine (if not, a case as to their suitability needs to be made)

The external examiner should not:
- have been a former member of the academic staff or a student of the University or Partner Institution in the past five years

- be a prospective member of staff in the process of applying for a position at the University or Partner Institution or recently been appointed to a staff position (this applies at any point during the examination process)

- have been involved in the supervision of the student

- have a professional or personal relationship with the student, the student's supervisor or the internal examiner that might give rise to a conflict of interest

6.5 Role of the external examiner

The external examiner's duties are as follows:

- to read the thesis, or, in the case of thesis involving original creative output assess the work presented

- to reach an independent judgment on the thesis, against the appropriate criteria for the award, without consulting the internal examiner about the assessment, and to record this on an Initial Report Form prior to the viva

- to send their completed Initial Report Form to the Postgraduate Research Education Team at least one week prior to the viva

- to attend the viva and viva pre-meeting

- to examine the thesis together with the internal examiner

- to come to an agreement with the internal examiner as to the outcome of the examination

- with the internal examiner, to complete the Joint Report Form, and compile the list of corrections if required

- in the case of a referral, normally to re-examine the referred thesis

6.6 Role of the internal examiner

The internal examiner's duties are as follows:

- to read the thesis, or, in the case of thesis involving original creative output assess the work presented

- to reach an independent judgment on the thesis, against the appropriate criteria for the award, without consulting the external examiner about the assessment, and to record this on an Initial Report Form prior to the viva

- to send their completed Initial Report Form to the Postgraduate Research Education Team at least one week prior to the viva

- to oversee the arrangements for the assessment process including liaising with the external examiner to set a date for the viva

- to ensure that the department notifies the student of the date for the viva

- to oversee the proceedings at the viva in accordance with University regulations and policies

- to examine the thesis together with the external examiner

- to come to an agreement with the external examiner as to the outcome of the examination

- with the external examiner, to complete the Joint Report Form; and compile the list of corrections if required

- in the case of a pass with corrections, to notify the Postgraduate Research Education Team when they have received the corrected thesis from the candidate and to assess the corrected thesis within a reasonable time period. For minor corrections this should be within two weeks and for major corrections within one month of receiving the corrections from the candidate

- in the case of a referral, normally to re-examine the referred thesis

6.7 Timescale

The viva should normally be held no later than two months after the receipt of the thesis by the examiners.

6.8 Conduct of the viva

Both examiners should be present at the viva, whether in-person or via Video Link, and are expected to follow the _University Policy on the Conduct of Research Degree Vivas_ (.pdf). and any supporting guidelines on the Viva sent to them on appointment. The examiners should hold a pre-viva meeting to discuss their preliminary views on the thesis and to plan the viva. The candidate should be given the opportunity to defend the thesis. It will usually be necessary for the candidate to temporarily leave the room/video call while the examiners confer as to the outcome of the examination and the candidate should then be told the result.

6.9 Independent Chair

In certain circumstances as contained in the University policy on the matter, the Dean may appoint an _Independent Chair for the viva_.

6.10 Reports and recommendations

Before the viva, the internal and external examiners must each complete, independently, an Initial Report Form giving their initial assessment of the thesis. These reports must be submitted to the

Postgraduate Research Education Team at least one week prior to the viva who will then arrange for the exchange of the reports.

Following the viva, the examiners must complete a Joint Report Form, which records the outcome of the examination. If the candidate is required to complete corrections the examiners must provide a list of corrections alongside the Joint Report to the Postgraduate Research Education Team for approval by the Dean.

Candidates are entitled to receive copies of the examiners' pre- and post-viva reports on their thesis on request, when examining is complete.

6.11 Waiving the viva

First submission
Permission to waive a viva will only be granted by the Dean in exceptional circumstances. If approved, the Postgraduate Research Education Team would notify the student of the examiners' wish not to hold a viva and the reasons for it, but they would be told that they have the right to have a viva should they wish.

Referred Theses
Where the recommended outcome of the examination of a referred thesis is a pass, then a request by the examiners to waive the viva will normally be granted. Where the recommendation is not a pass then a request by the examiners to waive the viva will only be granted in exceptional circumstances. If approved, the Postgraduate Research Education Team would notify the student of the examiners' request and the reasons for it, but they would be told that they have a right to have a viva should they wish.

6.12 Disagreement between examiners

When the examiners are unable to reach agreement on the outcome of the examination they shall record this on the Joint Report Form. A new internal and external examiner shall be appointed. The new examiners will be informed that the first examiners failed to reach a decision but will not be shown the preliminary reports. The new examiners will examine the thesis in the normal manner.

6.13 Suspected research misconduct (academic offences)

If either of the examiners suspects research misconduct at any stage during the examination process they should notify the Postgraduate Research Education Team who will arrange for the matter to be investigated in accordance with the University's _Research Integrity and Research Misconduct Procedures_ (.pdf). The viva shall be suspended.

6.14 Student Appeals against an Examination Decision

In cases where the candidate receives an outcome of fail, or referred for the award of, or option to resubmit for a lower degree, candidates may appeal the outcome of their examination. To do so they should consult the *Appeals Procedures against an Examination Decision - Postgraduate Research Students (including Professional Doctorates)* (.pdf).

7.Information and Regulations available elsewhere

Your registration as a research student is governed by the Principal Regulations for Research Degrees. These can be found on the University website at:
https://www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/regulations

8. University Regulations, Policy and Procedure

https://www.essex.ac.uk/governance/regulations

Research Integrity and Research Misconduct Procedures

https://www.essex.ac.uk/-/media/documents/about/governance/postgraduate-research-integrity-and-research-misconduct-policy.pdf (.pdf)

Progress and Appeals Procedure for Research Degree Students

https://www.essex.ac.uk/-/media/documents/about/governance/progress-appeals-procedures-research-degree-students.pdf (.pdf)

Code of Practice: Professional Doctorates

https://www.essex.ac.uk/-/media/documents/about/governance/code-practice-professional-doctorates.pdf (.pdf)

Code of Practice for the Supervision of Masters' Dissertations

https://www.essex.ac.uk/-/media/documents/about/governance/code-of-practice-supervision-masters-dissertations.pdf (.pdf)

Guidance on the employment of Assistant Lecturers and Graduate Laboratory Assistants

https://www.essex.ac.uk/staff/managing-people/employment-and-training-guidance-for-al

Conduct of Research Degree Vivas

https://www.essex.ac.uk/-/media/documents/about/governance/code-practice-vivas.pdf (.pdf)

Principal Regulations: Examination of Staff Candidates

https://www.essex.ac.uk/-/media/documents/about/governance/principal-regulations-research-degrees.pdf (.pdf)

Guidance Notes for Submitting a Thesis as a Series of Papers

https://www.essex.ac.uk/-/media/documents/about/governance/guidance-notes-thesis-by-papers.pdf (.pdf)

Approval of Title form

https://www1.essex.ac.uk/students/exams-and-coursework/documents/approval-thesis-title-form.docx (.docx)

Data Protection and Research Activity

https://www.essex.ac.uk/staff/freedom-of-information/data-protection-and-research

University of Essex Student Handbook

https://www.essex.ac.uk/student/resources/student-handbooks

Student Representative Policy

https://www.essex.ac.uk/-/media/documents/directories/academic-section/academic-standards-and-quality/student-voice-policy.pdf (.pdf)

Document Control Panel

Field	Description
Title	Code of Practice: Postgraduate Research Degrees
Policy Classification	Code of Practice
Security Classification	Open
Security Rationale	N/A
Policy Manager Role	Senior Postgraduate Research Education Manager
Nominated Contact	pgresearch@essex.ac.uk
Responsible UoE Section	Academic Section
Approval Body	Senate
Signed Off Date	N/A
Publication Status	Published
Published Date	August 2024
Last Review Date	June 2024
Minimum Review Frequency	Yearly
Review Date	May 2025
UoE Identifier	0172

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