



Code of Practice: Professional Doctorates

2023-2024

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Code of Practice: Professional Doctorates 2023-24

This document is a broad statement of University requirements covering departments', supervisors' and students' responsibilities in relation to professional doctorates (PD). 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 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. Department Responsibilities

Each Department, School, Centre or Partner Institution with professional doctorates students should:

1.1. Professional Doctorate Director

Designate a Director for each Professional Doctorate, a group of professional doctorates, or equivalent, who is an experienced doctoral student supervisor. The Director will be responsible to the Head of Department (HoD) for the departmental arrangements for the relevant PD students 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 PD students are supplied with the details of the departmental arrangements for PD students. The departmental documentation and the arrangements it describes should be appropriate for the degree programme concerned and should be approved by the Dean.

Departmental documentation will be reviewed every three years or sooner if the department wishes to make any major changes to the arrangements or if any changes to University policies, procedures or regulations requires it.

1.3. Student induction

Ensure that all new PD 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 PD 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. Placements

Where professional practice placements are part of the professional doctorate, ensure that these are arranged in accordance with the University's [Work-Based and Placement Learning guidelines](#) and that students receive written information about the placements.

1.5. Professional practice supervisors

Ensure that all new PD students have a designated supervisor for their professional practice, whether this involves a placement or not. A record should be kept by the Director of the programme of the professional practice supervisors for each student for the year/term as appropriate.

1.6. Replacement of professional practice supervisors

Where a professional practice supervisor cannot continue supervision for whatever reason, ensure that a replacement supervisor is appointed. Any changes in supervision must be approved by the Professional Doctorate 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.

1.7. List of Supervisors

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

1.8. Research and generic skills training

Identify and record the student's research and generic skills training needs at the beginning of their studies and review them on a regular basis. Ensure that the student has opportunities for developing appropriate generic and research skills and that a record of module/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 or through Supervisory Panel reports.

1.9. Research supervisors

Ensure that no later than the end of the first year for full-time PD programmes, and no later than the end of the second year for part-time PD programmes, appropriate research supervisory arrangements are in place for all PD students. Each student must have at least one research supervisor who is engaged in research activity and has relevant publications. Where two supervisors are appointed, one supervisor must be nominated as the lead supervisor who will be the first point of contact for the student, and responsible for record keeping and providing reports. Where a member of staff who has not previously supervised a doctoral student through to completion is appointed as sole research supervisor, support must be provided through the department's normal mentoring arrangements as well as through the Supervisory Panel (see [section 4](#) below). The Director must keep an up-to-date record of all the PD students and their research supervisors. Supervisors should remain well informed and up to date on all PGR policy and Practice information; for example through the Supervisory Good Practice Guide

A record of supervisory meetings/communications should be kept in accordance with the

[*Progress and Appeals Procedures for Research Degree Students*](#) (.pdf)

1.10. Replacement of research supervisors ([see section 4 below](#))

Ensure that adequate arrangements are made for research supervision when any of the research supervisors either leave the University or is on an extended period of leave (for example a form of parental leave or sabbatical) leave and is not carrying on with supervision during this period. Any changes in supervision must be approved by the PD 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.

1.11. Research supervision and the frequency of supervisory meetings

Agree suitable norms regarding the frequency of formal supervisory meetings between PD students and research 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 research supervisors. Research 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 A record of supervisory meetings/communications should be kept in accordance with the *Progress and Appeals Procedures for Research Degree Students* (.pdf)

1.12. Supervisory Panels

Ensure that a Supervisory Panel involving the research supervisor(s) and at least one member of staff who is not the student's research supervisor is held at least once a year for all PD students from the initiation of the research stage. 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.

1.13. Time allocation for supervision

Ensure adequate academic staff time is allocated for the supervision of each PD 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.

1.14. Problems with professional practice or research 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 PD

Director, the Chair of the Research Students' Progress Board (RSPB), or Head of Department. 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 Postgraduate Research Education Team. Discussions about problems with either professional practice or research 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.

1.15. Research thesis submission deadlines: full-time and part-time students

Ensure that students understand the University regulations on thesis submission deadlines which vary dependent on the PD programme. 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, with the Deans' approval.

1.16. 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. The milestones document should be included in the *PGR Student Handbook* supplied to students and supervisors. It should be made clear that progress from one year to the next (including progress into the completion period for part-time students only), will depend on satisfactory achievement of the necessary work.

1.17. Examination Board and Research Students' Progress Board (RSPB)

Ensure that the relevant Board of Examiners has ratified the results of all taught provision related to the Professional Doctorate. Ensure that an RSPB is held at least once a year to review the progress of all Professional Doctorate students and report this to the Postgraduate Research Education Team. The meeting should be held in the summer term before the end of June. Any additional meetings should be held as required in line with University deadlines for progress decisions (usually December, March/April).

1.18. Reports on students' progress

Ensure that an individual report on each student's progress is provided to the Dean towards the end of each year of their study. This should indicate that all the elements for the stage of the programme have been passed satisfactorily and (from the second year onward for full-time students) report the state of

the research and the amount of work that has been carried out. The report should recommend whether the student be allowed to progress to the following year or whether a downgrading 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.

1.19. Training for Professional Practice Supervisors

Ensure that all professional practice supervisors are supplied with the University's *Code of Practice for Professional Doctorates*, and departmental arrangements for professional practice supervision are adequately trained to provide professional practice supervision and are fully aware of the requirements of the supervision they provide and the standards expected of the students.

1.20. Staff induction and training

Ensure that all new members of staff who may become PD student supervisors are seen by the Director to discuss the University's *Code of Practice for Professional Doctorates* 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 doctoral student through to completion attend the University's training for doctoral supervisors and that opportunities for sharing good practice in supervision are included in the arrangements for training and support provided to all academic staff, including any mentoring provision.

1.21. Academic networking

Ensure that PD students are advised of the importance of making contact with other professionals in the field and of presenting their work to professional 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.

1.22. Facilities

Ensure that PD students have access to the departmental facilities and the equipment (or online equivalent) necessary to enable them to complete their professional doctorate successfully, and that they have adequate facilities during any placement.

1.23. 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.

1.24. External research supervisors

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

1.25. Appointment of examiners

Nominate examiners for a student's thesis (see [section 6.3.](#) below).

Nominate award examiners for assessed elements of the programme that are not covered by the Department's taught Masters examiners.

2. Professional Practice and Research Supervisors' Responsibilities

Professional practice and research supervisors have a responsibility to:

2.1. 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

Professional practice supervisors must maintain regular contact with the student through meetings during the period when the supervised professional practice is taking place; research supervisors must maintain regular contact with the student 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.

When supervising a student with immigration sponsorship, ensure that, wherever possible, 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. Guidance

Provide guidance about the nature and standard of work expected, including advice on attaining that standard, together with advice on professional practice and/or research in the discipline, matters of research design, ethical issues, and appropriate health and safety issues. They should also assist each PD student in developing a clear timetable of work and emphasise the importance of keeping to it. Research supervisors should provide guidance on matters of research design, and on the appropriate volume of research work for the degree in question.

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. Professional practice supervisors must attend any training required by the Department. Less experienced research supervisors who have not supervised a doctoral student through to completion must attend the University's course on supervising research degrees and will be provided with a mentor.

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 for developing 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](#), where available, 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 provided, which can be produced later if required.

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

2.10. Supervisory Panels (see section 4 below)

Research supervisors must 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 (research) or Board of Examiners (professional practice) as required, indicating what has been achieved, advising where they believe that the student's progress is satisfactory or where progress is slow. In the case of Supervisory Panels, the research supervisor should ensure that the chair of the panel forwards a report on the panel to the PD 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 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, directing 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, provide guidance on the examination process, and help students to prepare for the viva and direct the student to appropriate training.

2.15. Approval of title

The supervisor and Head of Department 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 student's thesis as stipulated in the Guidelines for the Appointment of Research Examiners (see Regulation 4.28 (.pdf))

2.17. Thesis examination

The supervisor should not be present at 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

PD students should be provided by departments 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 partner institutions and the postgraduate portfolio in the relevant subject(s)
- the University's and partner institutions' regulations and procedures for professional doctorates
- details of the professional doctorate including the taught elements, professional practice (including any placements) and research, and the assessment requirements
- 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 university-wide induction events. In addition, departments should hold a face-to-face student induction no later than the end of the third week of the first term. This should 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 professional doctorate students during the course of their studies and where guidance may be sought in the event of difficulties
- progress and, where appropriate, completion procedures and requirements
- the University's research ethics and codes and those of relevant professional bodies and discipline groups
- issues concerning authorship, plagiarism and 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-staff liaison committees and the appropriate Education Committee
- opportunities for interdisciplinary activities
- 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 (Research Thesis)

4.1. Composition

Usually as a minimum, Supervisory Panels should consist of the supervisor(s), plus at least one other member of the academic staff who is not involved in supervising the student, who should chair the panel. Where the supervisor is a less experienced member of staff who has not supervised a doctoral 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 must 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

Research supervisors should ensure that meetings of Supervisory Panels with the student are arranged at least once a year for all PD students until they have submitted. **It is standard practice for these meetings to take place in person, however, if all Supervisory Panel members agree, Panels can be held virtually.** 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](#) (.pdf).

4.3. Advice, monitoring and reports

The purpose of Supervisory Panels is to provide the student with a wide 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 (ie whether undertaking a thesis by papers or traditional thesis format) (.pdf). It is also the role of the Chair of the Panel to prepare a formal report on the student's progress for 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 Director, along with the student's report, for consideration at the next Board of Examiners/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. 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. Examination Board and Research Students' Progress Board

5.1. Composition and role of the Examination Board

An Examination Board is responsible for making decisions on any taught or professional elements of a professional doctorate.

The Examination Board for a Professional Doctorate should follow the University's rules concerning the composition of Examination Boards and those concerning anonymity. The Board must be chaired by an experienced member of staff from outside the Department and must include the PD Director. The other

members would normally include an experienced professional practice supervisor. The Examination Board must meet annually, and may have interim meetings. The Examination Board will agree any marks for taught modules and receive reports on any professional component. The Examination Board will send a copy of the pass list and marks grid to the RSPB.

If a student has not met the taught progression requirements as set out in the relevant Rules of Assessment, the taught board has the power to downgrade or discontinue a student as appropriate, notifying the relevant RSPB of the outcome. A student can appeal the outcome of the taught board at the point in which the taught board notifies the student, following the standard appeals procedures for taught students.

5.2. Composition and role of the RSPB

The RSPB, to be established by each department, should be chaired by the PD Director or HoD, and should include at least two other experienced supervisors. It should review the progress of every 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. Where no Supervisory Panel has taken place, for instance because a student is carrying out research abroad, the supervisor and the student must each submit a progress report. A decision/recommendation for discontinuation or downgrading, to permit entry into completion, or to extend the standard period can only be made by the RSPB. Where the RSPB is considering a recommendation from a student's Supervisory Panel of discontinuation or downgrading, 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.

5.3. Frequency and timing

There should be at least one formal review of professional doctorate students' progress each year in the summer term. Any review that recommends progression to the next year, entry into a completion period and any recommendation for discontinuation or downgrading should normally take the form of a face-to-face meeting of the RSPB.

5.4. Taught/professional requirements

For students on a professional doctorate programme that includes compulsory taught and/or professional 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.

5.5. 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 recommendation that the student's status should be altered (eg downgraded, standard period extended, permission to move into completion considered, etc); or
- a recommendation that the student's studies should be discontinued

The Dean may accept or reject the recommendation and may require the Supervisory Panel or RSPB to reconvene.

In all cases, a copy of the Supervisory Panel report on each student shall be forwarded to the Postgraduate Research Education Team.

5.6. 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 [*Appeals Procedures against a Progress Decision*](#) (.pdf)). The Board should in all cases inform the student in writing of the Board's recommendation and of the opportunity to appeal.

5.7. Mid-Year recommendations and special meetings

The RSPB can recommend discontinuation or downgrading at any point in the academic year and special meetings can be convened at any time.

5.8. 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.

5.9. Requests for further information from the Dean

The Dean may request further information on any student and discuss their progress with the student, supervisor, PD 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 (Research Thesis)

6.1. Nomination and appointment of thesis 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 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, who 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 staff of the University or partner institution
- 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
- 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
- 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
- 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
- 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 candidate of the date of the viva
- to oversee the proceedings at the viva in accordance with University regulations and policies
- 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 leave the room while the examiners confer as to the outcome of the examination and the candidate should then be told the result. Where it is not possible to conduct the viva face-to-face, permission must be requested from the Dean for the viva to be conducted via a video link in accordance with the University policy on the matter.

6.9. Independent Chair

In certain circumstances, such as where the candidate is examined only by external examiners or in an examination following an appeal, the Dean may appoint an independent chair to attend a viva in accordance with the [Policy for the Appointment of an Independent Chair \(.pdf\)](#). Where there is no internal examiner the independent Chair will perform the co-ordinating function in relation to the examination process. The Independent Chair is not an examiner of the thesis.

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.

On receiving the examiners' recommendation, the Dean will seek confirmation from the PD Director that all components of the PD programme have been completed satisfactorily before approving the award of the degree.

6.11. Waiving the Viva

First Submission

Permission to waive a viva will only be granted by the Dean in exceptional circumstances. The Postgraduate Research Education Team would then 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 if they wish.

Referred Thesis

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. The Postgraduate Research Education Team would then 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 if 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 academic offences

If either of the examiners suspects an academic offence at any stage during the examination process they should notify the Postgraduate Research Education Team which will arrange for the matter to be investigated in accordance with the University's *Academic Offences Policy* (.pdf). The viva shall be suspended.

6.14. Student appeals against an examination decision

Candidates may appeal the outcome of their examination. To do so they should consult the [Appeals Procedures for Postgraduate Research Students](#) (.pdf).

7. Appeals Procedures

[Academic Appeals Procedure for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Students](#) (.pdf)

[Appeals against an examination decision - postgraduate research students](#) (.pdf)

[Appeals against a progress decision - professional doctorate students](#) (.pdf)

8. Criteria for Award of Research Degrees

The work (thesis/dissertation) submitted by a candidate for a research degree is assessed against the following criteria as set out in the [Principal Regulations for Research Degrees](#).

Professional Doctorates

A thesis submitted for a professional doctorate must embody the results of research carried out during the approved period of study. In the thesis and the oral examination the candidate is required to conduct and present original investigations that make a significant contribution to the nature of practice within the profession or to the way theory is applied, to understand the relationship of the theme of the investigations to a wider field of knowledge and to express themselves clearly and concisely.

Word Length

The maximum word length of the thesis is 40,000 words, excluding any references and bibliography.

Exit Awards

Masters By Dissertation

A dissertation for the degree of Masters by Dissertation is required to present the results of research carried out during the approved period of study and should demonstrate advanced understanding of the area of study. In the dissertation and the oral examination the candidate is required to present the results of research that either forms original work or is an ordered and critical exposition of existing knowledge. The dissertation should set out the relationship between the candidate's work and the wider field of knowledge, and should be expressed clearly and concisely.

In the case of a dissertation involving original creative output, the dissertation must embody the results of research carried out/or output created during the approved period of study and should demonstrate advanced understanding of the area of study. The dissertation must contain a commentary that addresses the originality and artistic relevance of the work. The dissertation should set out the relationship between the candidate's work and the wider field of knowledge/the genre, and should be expressed clearly and concisely.

Word Length

The maximum word length of the dissertation is 30,000 words, excluding any references and bibliography. Maximum word length for a dissertation including creative output may vary depending on the format of the dissertation.

9. Information and Regulations available elsewhere

Your registration as a Professional Doctorate student is governed by the Principal Regulations for Research Degrees. These can be found on the University website at:

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

University Regulations, Policy and Procedure

<https://www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/regulations>

Academic Offences Procedure

<https://www.essex.ac.uk/-/media/documents/about/governance/academic-offences-procedure.pdf> (.pdf)

Academic Appeals Procedure for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Students

<https://www.essex.ac.uk/-/media/documents/about/governance/academic-appeals-procedure-undergraduate-and-postgraduate-taught.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 Graduate Teachers

<https://www.essex.ac.uk/-/media/documents/about/governance/graduate-teachers-employment-guidance.pdf> (.pdf)

Conduct of Research Degree Vivas

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

Principal Regulations: Examination of Staff Candidates

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

Data Protection and Research Activity

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

Approval of Title form

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

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)

University of Essex Student Handbook

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

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