

Instructions to Examiners of Research Degrees

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# Research Degree Candidates

* 1. Candidates may proceed to the degree of Master of Arts (Social Sciences and Humanities subject areas), to the degree of Master of Science (Social Sciences and Sciences subject areas), to the degree of Master of Law (Social Sciences subject areas) and to the degree of Master of Philosophy (across all subject areas) by submitting a thesis, and if the examiners concerned or the Dean of the Graduate and Researcher College so require, by taking a written examination.
  2. Candidates may proceed to the degree of PhD (across all subject areas) and to the degrees of Doctor of Clinical Science, Doctor of Medicine or Master of Surgery (Sciences subject areas) by submitting a thesis and, if examiners concerned or the Dean of the Graduate and Researcher College so require, by taking a written examination.
  3. Where examination is of research comprised in whole or in part by practice as research, the format and composition of the student’s thesis will have been agreed in advance between the student, supervisory team and Chair of the supervisory team. Although practice will be examined under conditions appropriate to the subject, it is essential that students also submit documentation of their practice that can form an accessible and lasting record. This should be included with the soft and hard bound copies.
  4. Each candidate for the degree of Master’s by research and thesis and degree of PhD or DClinSci and the degree of MD shall be examined by two or more examiners, of whom at least one shall be an External Examiner. Candidates employed by the University in a substantive academic role shall be examined by at least three examiners, of whom two must be External and one Internal. The examiners may, at their discretion and subject to the agreement of the candidate, invite the candidate's supervisor to attend an oral examination as a silent observer.

# Oral Examination

* 1. Candidates for the degree of Master’s by research and thesis are, in addition, required to satisfy the examiners in an oral examination if the examiners or the relevant Divisional Director of Graduate Studies and Student Experience so decide.
  2. Candidates for the degrees of PhD, DClinSci, MD and MSurg are required to satisfy the examiners in an oral examination unless specifically exempted from this requirement by the Dean of the Graduate and Researcher College.
  3. Candidates for the Postgraduate Diploma by Research and Training are required to satisfy the examiners in an oral examination if the examiners or the Divisional Director of Graduate Studies so decide.

# Assessment Criteria for Research Degrees

## Master’s Degrees by Research and Thesis (Arts, Science, Research, Law)

On successful completion of a Master’s degree course candidates will have:

1. met the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) level descriptors for a Master’s degree (outlined below);
2. met any subject-specific assessment criteria outlined in the course specification (if applicable);
3. shown appropriate ability in the organisation and presentation of their material in the thesis;
4. shown in the thesis ability to conduct an independent study and to understand its relationship to a wider field of knowledge**.**

The *Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* states that:

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

1. a systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study, or area of professional practice;
2. a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship;
3. originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline;
4. conceptual understanding that enables the student:

* to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline; and
* to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses.

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

1. deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, make sound judgements in the absence of complete data, and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences;
2. demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level;
3. continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and to develop new skills to a high level;

and will have:

1. the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:

* the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility;
* decision-making in complex and unpredictable situations; and
* the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development.

## Master of Philosophy

On successful completion of a Master of Philosophy degree course candidates will have:

1. met the Framework for Higher Education Qualification (FHEQ) level descriptor for a Master’s degree (outlined below);
2. met any subject specific assessment criteria outlined in the course specification (if applicable);

1. shown appropriate ability in the organisation and presentation of their material in the thesis;
2. acquired specialist knowledge in relation to their chosen area of research to a standard sufficient to conduct an original investigation.

*The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*states that*:*

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

1. a systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study, or area of professional practice;
2. a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship;
3. originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline;
4. conceptual understanding that enables the student:

* to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline; and
* to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses.

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

1. deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, make sound judgements in the absence of complete data, and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences;
2. demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level;
3. continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and to develop new skills to a high level;

and will have:

1. the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:

* the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility;
* decision-making in complex and unpredictable situations; and
* the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development.

## Doctor of Philosophy or Doctor of Clinical Sciences

On successful completion of a PhD or DClinSci course candidates will have:

1. met the Framework for Higher Education Qualification (FHEQ) level descriptor for a doctorate degree (outlined below).
2. met any subject specific assessment criteria outlined in the course specification (if applicable).
3. shown appropriate ability in the organisation and presentation of their material in the thesis.

*The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*states that:

Doctorates are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

1. the creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline, and merit publication;
2. a systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline or area of professional practice;
3. the general ability to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge, applications or understanding at the forefront of the discipline, and to adjust the project design in the light of unforeseen problems;
4. a detailed understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry.

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

1. make informed judgements on complex issues in specialist fields, often in the absence of complete data, and be able to communicate their ideas and conclusions clearly and effectively to specialist and non-specialist audiences;
2. continue to undertake pure and/or applied research and development at an advanced level, contributing substantially to the development of new techniques, ideas, or approaches;

and will have:

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

## Doctor of Medicine or Master of Surgery

In order to be eligible for the award of the Doctor of Medicine or Master of Surgery the thesis should be an original contribution to knowledge or understanding in the field under investigation and should demonstrate the candidate's ability to test ideas, whether their own or those of others, and to understand the relationship of the theme of the investigation to a wider field of knowledge. It should be of such scholarly merit as would on that ground justify its publication either as submitted or in an abridged form. The candidate is also required to show appropriate ability in the organisation and presentation of their material in the thesis (see section 4).

## Postgraduate Diploma by Research and Training

In order to be eligible for the award of the Postgraduate Diploma by Research and Training a candidate is required to show in the dissertation ability to conduct a programme of research and to show that they understand the relationship of this programme of research to a wider field of knowledge. The candidate is also required to show appropriate ability in the organisation and presentation of their material in the thesis (see section 4).

# Presentation of the Thesis

* 1. If a thesis is based in whole or in part on collaborative research, the candidate is required to indicate the extent of this collaboration.
  2. If a thesis incorporates any material that the candidate has previously presented and which has been accepted for the award of an academic qualification at this University or elsewhere, the candidate is required to identify this material. Examiners should ignore any such material in deciding whether the candidate is worthy of the award.
  3. Candidates are told to note that conciseness of presentation is an essential part of the ‘appropriate ability in the organisation and presentation’ of their material which they are required to demonstrate in accordance with the assessment criteria for research degrees outlined in the Regulations for Research Courses of Study.
  4. The instructions given to candidates with regard to the length of a written thesis are as follows:
     1. **Humanities subject areas:**

For the degree of PhD: not more than 100,000 words.

For candidates registered on practice-based courses: between 30,000 and 40,000 words.

For the degree of MPhil: not more than 60,000 words.

For the degree of MA: not more than 40,000 words.

* + 1. **Sciences subject areas:**

For the degree of PhD: Normally between 160-225 pages, but not more than 250 pages, including diagrams.

For the degree of MPhil: normally between 140 and 200 pages.

For the degree of MSc: normally between 130 and 150 pages.

Doctor of Medicine or Master of Surgery: normally between 140 and 200 pages.

* + 1. **Social Sciences subject areas:**

The required word count will be set by each School.

* 1. A thesis that exceeds the maximum length specified without permission will not be examined.
  2. Where examination is of research comprised in whole or in part by practice as research, the format and composition of the student’s thesis will have been agreed in advance between the student, supervisory team and the Chair of the supervisory team. In such cases, there is no University prescribed length of written submission or volume of practice, but appropriate maximum limits will be set and communicated to the examiners.
  3. The total number of pages or words referred to above may be taken as excluding bibliographies, references, appendices, quotations, footnotes and any supplementary material (tables of results, etc.) which it may be desirable to submit for ease of reference, but which do not form an essential part of the main text of the thesis.
  4. When the candidate has taken a written examination the examiners shall jointly determine whether or not a satisfactory standard has been achieved.

# Examiners’ Responsibilities

## Examiners reports

* + 1. In the case of candidates for Master’s by research and thesis, the examiners shall submit separate reports concerning the candidate's performance including a specific recommendation about the award of the degree as in paragraph 5.2 below.
    2. In the case of PhD, DClinSci, MD and MSurg candidates, after reading the thesis and prior to the oral examination, each examiner should complete independently Part A of the report form, answering the specific questions in section 1 and providing a general report of the thesis in section 2. The Part A report should be returned to the Divisional PG Office by the date set by the Office. After considering the results of any oral examination that they have conducted the examiners should complete one joint report (Part B). The Part B report should be returned to the Divisional PG Office by the date set by the Office.
    3. In the case of Postgraduate Diploma by Research and Training candidates, examiners shall submit separate reports concerning the candidate’s performance including a specific recommendation about the award of the Postgraduate Diploma by Research and Training in paragraph 5.2 below.

## Examiners’ recommendations

After examining the thesis presented by a candidate and considering the results of any oral or written examination that they have conducted, the examiners, at their discretion, may recommend that:

* + 1. that the degree/diploma for which the candidate is registered be awarded;

**Note:**minor typographical errors may be corrected*.*

* + 1. that the degree/diploma be awarded subject to certain minor corrections to the thesis being carried out to the satisfaction of the internal examiner within three months of the official notification to the candidate of the recommendation of the examiners;

**Note:** Minor corrections include the following: spelling/typing errors, textual errors; reordering of material; correction of literature citations (possibly inclusion of a few additional citations); correction of figures, tables and diagrams (possibly inclusion of one or two additional figures/tables/ diagrams); additional sections for clarification or qualification. If a substantial amount of new material is needed, examiners should not use this recommendation.

* + 1. that the degree/diploma be awarded subject to revisions to the thesis being carried out to the satisfaction of the Internal and external examiner within six months of the official notification to the candidate of the recommendation of the examiners;

**Note:** Revisions will normally take the form of more extensive revisions than that implied by a decision of pass with minor corrections. This decision will not require any significant extension of the original research to be undertaken by the candidate, if this is deemed necessary, examiners should recommend a resubmission. The examiners must be agreed that the candidate will be able to achieve the amendments within no more than six months from notification.

* + 1. that the degree be not awarded at present, but that the candidate be permitted to resubmit the thesis in a revised form not later (except in cases of illness or other good cause) than twelve months after the decision to allow resubmission has been made by the Dean of the Graduate and Researcher College. If at least one of the examiners so wishes, they may require the candidate to undergo an oral or written examination or both;

**Note:** A candidate should only be permitted one opportunity to resubmit except in exceptional circumstances where mitigating circumstances may justify a second resubmission.

* + 1. that the degree be not awarded at present, but that the candidate be permitted to take a further oral or written examination or both, on one further occasion, normally not later than six months after the decision to allow this has been made by the Divisional Director of Graduate Studies and PG Student Experience.

**Note:**This recommendation may only be made in cases where the candidate submits a thesis judged satisfactory by the examiners for the award but fails to satisfy the examiners in the written or oral examination or both.

* + 1. In the case of candidates for the degree of Master of Philosophy:
       1. in the Divisions of Arts and Humanities; Human and Social Sciences, Law, Society and Social Justice and Kent Business School: that the candidate be permitted to resubmit the thesis without alteration and without further scrutiny for the award of the degree of Master of Arts.
       2. in the Divisions of Natural Sciences and Computing, Engineering and Mathematical Sciences: that the candidate be permitted to resubmit the thesis without alteration and without further scrutiny for the award of the degree of Master of Science.
    2. In the case of Master by Research and Thesis, the degree be not awarded but that the candidate be awarded a Postgraduate Diploma by Research and Training.

**Note:** Examiners may so recommend in the case of a candidate who has not shown the necessary ability to conduct an independent study but who has otherwise satisfied the requirements for the degree of Master as set out in paragraph 8.4.1 of the regulations

* + 1. that in the case of PhD, DClinSci, MD or MSurg candidates:
       1. that the degree be not awarded, but that the candidate be permitted to resubmit the thesis without alteration and without further scrutiny for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy or Master of Clinical Science.
       2. that the degree be not awarded, but that the candidate be permitted to resubmit the thesis for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy or Master of Clinical Science subject to certain minor corrections being carried out to the satisfaction of the Internal Examiner within three months of the official notification to the candidate of the recommendation of the examiners.
    2. that the degree/diploma be not awarded.

**Note:** In the case of Master by research and thesis, this recommendation should not normally be made unless the candidate has been given an opportunity to defend the thesis in an oral examination.

* + 1. The University Senate has agreed that, when examining an initial submission (i.e. where the candidate has not previously been examined and asked to revise and resubmit the thesis), examiners should, except in exceptional circumstances, recommend as per one of paragraphs 8.2.1 – 8.2.5 above, i.e. that the candidate should be awarded the research degree or should be offered a further opportunity to meet the requirements for award of the research degree. However, examiners may, if they wish, recommend that the candidate be permitted to choose between 8.2.4 and 8.2.6 or between 8.2.4 and 8.2.8.2 above i.e., between revising and resubmitting for the research degree or accepting the award of MPhil (with or without minor corrections).

**Note:** the initial submission should be found by the examiners to be at a standard of the award of MPhil/MClinSci as a minimum. Where the submission is not considered to reach the minimum standard the examiners may make recommendations for thesis corrections.

* + 1. Where it has been recommended by the examiners that a research candidate should make thesis corrections, as set out above, and both examiners have subsequently agreed that those corrections have not been completed to a satisfactory level, the examiners, at their discretion, may recommend to the Divisional Director of Graduate Studies and PG Student Experience:
       1. The award of the lower degree; or
       2. That the candidate be permitted a further three months to complete the corrections and resubmit the thesis. If, after resubmission, the examiners find that the corrections are still unsatisfactory no further opportunity will be granted and the lower degree will be awarded
       3. That the degree be not awarded
    2. Examiners’ recommendations for the award of qualifications must be approved by the Divisional Director of Graduate Studies and PG Student Experience and by Senate, or by persons authorised to act on their behalf, and the result of the examination shall not be published until after such approval. In the event of doubt or disagreement between the examiners, the Divisional Director of Graduate Studies may recommend to Senate the appointment of a further examiners, or take such other action as it may deem desirable.

## Examination Deadlines

## Master by Research and Thesis

The reports and recommendations of examiners and their copies of the thesis must be returned to the Divisional Office. Examiners are asked to do so as soon as possible - normally within three months from the time of receipt of the thesis.

## PhD, MD and MSurg

The individual reports (Parts A) should be returned to the Divisional PG Office by the requested date and no later than one week before the viva is due to take place. The joint report and recommendation of examiners (Part B), copies of the thesis and the minor corrections/revisions form if applicable must be returned to the Divisional PG Office as soon as possible and by the date set by the Office. The whole examination process should normally be completed within three months of receipt of the thesis.

## Postgraduate Diploma by Research and Training

The reports and recommendations of the examiners and their copies of the dissertation must be returned to the Divisional PG Office. Examiners are asked to do so as soon as possible – normally within three months from the time of receipt of the dissertation.

In the case of the degree of PhD, MD and MSurg, individual reports will be held confidential to the University. It is University policy that the joint report and the recommendations be made available to the candidate.

# Contact with Examiners

Under no circumstances should candidates contact their Internal or External Examiners, or any Independent Observer, about their research degree examination outside of the formal examination process. The Divisional PG Office should make this clear to the candidate when the examiners are appointed.