

Policy and Guidance on Reasonable Adjustments for Disabled Students on Doctoral and MPhil Research Degree Programmes

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Section 1 Policy on Reasonable Adjustments for Disabled Students on Doctoral and MPhil Research Degree Programmes

1.1 Purpose

This Policy outlines Newcastle University's approach to implementing reasonable adjustments across teaching, learning, and assessment for disabled students studying postgraduate research programmes (referred to in this policy and guidance as the *PGR student*). It is intended to guide all staff involved in the design, delivery, and support of students throughout their academic programme.

1.2 Scope

This policy applies to Doctoral and MPhil postgraduate research (PGR) programmes where a PGR student has declared a disability, or where a disability is reasonably suspected. It covers all activities related to the research project, Code of Practice activities (such as Project Approval and Annual Progress Review), and examination within Doctoral and MPhil postgraduate research programmes.

1.3 Legal Duty

The **Equality Act 2010** places a duty on higher education providers to take proactive measures to ensure disabled students are not placed at a substantial disadvantage. This includes anticipating the needs of students with disclosed or reasonably suspected disabilities and implementing reasonable adjustments to support their access to education. The Act says that a person has a disability if they have a **physical or mental impairment which has a long term and substantial adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities**. [s6(1)]

Within this definition:

- **'Long term'** means that the impairment has lasted, or is likely to last, for at least 12 months or for the rest of the disabled person's life. (The period of at least 12 months could be one consolidated period of 12 months or more or – with a fluctuating or recurring condition, for example – the impact may be made up of separate periods of time that amount to 12 months or more when added together.)
- **'Substantial'** means an effect which is more than minor or trivial.
- **'Day-to-day activities'** are activities carried out by most people on a regular and frequent basis. These include, but are not limited to, activities such as walking, driving, using public transport, cooking, eating, lifting and carrying everyday objects, typing, writing (and taking exams), going to the toilet, talking, listening to conversations or music, reading, taking part in normal social interaction or forming social relationships, nourishing and caring for one's self, or activities which are relevant to working life [including study].

1.4 Reasonable Adjustments

Reasonable adjustments are practical changes made to provide equitable access to services offered to disabled students, including pre-entry admission processes, post-entry teaching, learning and assessment. This means considering how a disabled student may be placed at a disadvantage when accessing educational services offered or provided and how this disadvantage, arising because of a disability, can be substantially reduced or removed through the provision of a reasonable adjustment. This is generally referred to as identifying barriers to study. Disabled students experiencing the same barrier may require different adjustments. What we need to consider when identifying and making reasonable adjustments:

Physical feature:

- Building access [automatic door openers, lifts, emergency evacuation]
- Accessible toilets
- Accessible workstation [location, desk, seating, lighting]
- Digital Access [Websites and online learning platforms]

Provision, Criterion or Practice

- Policy and procedures
- Information and communication methods
- Assessment format [is an alternative format needed]
- Flexible deadlines
- Scheduling [meetings may need to be scheduled early or later in day]

Auxiliary Aids and Services

- Equipment [specific keyboard, mouse]
- Human support [sign language interpreter, note taker, practical support, sighted guide]
- Induction loop [hearing impairment]

A disabled student can still be considered for reasonable adjustments even if they do not engage with the Disability Service.

The Equality Act does not define reasonable, but consideration should be given to whether the proposed adjustment will be effective in practice, health and safety requirements, other resources available to provide the support or adjustments such as Disabled Students' Allowances.

Unless there is good reason not to make a reasonable adjustment [the adjustment would compromise a competency standard, not meet health and safety standards, or not be effective in practice] then we should put the adjustment in place for the PGR student.

[Refer to Section 5 for examples of PGR reasonable adjustments at Newcastle]

1.5 Competence Standards

The duty to make reasonable adjustments does not apply to a legitimate competence standard, but only to the way the competence standard is assessed. The Equality Act defines a competence standard as '**An academic, medical or other standard applied for the purpose of determining whether or not a person has a particular level of competence or ability.**' (Sch. 13, para 4(3)).

A competence standard is distinct from an academic standard or course requirement. It should contain a set of defined skills or ability and apply a clear objective metric for assessing the required skill or ability.

1.6 Declaring a Disability

PGR Students may declare a disability in several different ways. This could include:

- Informing Disability Services directly, either as an applicant or as a current PGR student.
- Informing a member of staff elsewhere in the university (for example, the PGR student's supervisor).
- Sharing information through academic processes (for example, an application for mitigating circumstances, academic appeal).
- Sharing information through non-academic processes (for example, accommodation application, financial hardship application).

The University has a legal duty to anticipate and make reasonable adjustments for PGR students who declare a disability. Information shared by a PGR student about their disability may be shared with other colleagues/services for the purpose of making reasonable adjustments.

Where a full assessment of the disabled PGR student's needs has not yet been made by the Disability Service, consideration of adjustments may be considered.

If a PGR student is struggling to engage or affected by a temporary or long-term health condition, mental health issue, or disability that impacts their ability to study, the academic unit may implement reasonable adjustments—such as those outlined in the Support to Study procedure or Personal Extenuating Circumstances Procedure (PEC).

1.7 Confidentiality

A PGR student may request that their disability remains confidential. However, it is important to assess whether this request is reasonable and, if so, whether the necessary adjustments can be made in an alternative manner. For instance, if health and safety concerns are identified, sharing information with specific colleagues, such as technicians, may be required to ensure the PGR student can safely operate equipment. In some cases, maintaining confidentiality might mean that the adjustment cannot be provided, and the PGR student should be informed.

1.8 Health and Safety

Health and Safety legislation overrides the duty to make a reasonable adjustment where making the adjustment would place or increase the risks to a PGR student or others. Colleagues should adhere to University Health and Safety policies and [Management Standards](#) and carry out a required [risk assessment](#) to identify appropriate controls, but also to consider reasonable adjustments that will minimise risk for the PGR student.

Section 2 Caselaw

The ruling in [Abrahart vs University of Bristol](#) and subsequent [appeal](#) emphasized the importance of recognizing and acting on clear behavioural indicators of a potential disability, even without a formal declaration. Universities must therefore be proactive in identifying such signs and taking appropriate steps to support students.

The judgement in [The University of Bristol v Dr Robert Abrahart](#) at 186 states:

- i. What competence or ability is being measured?
- ii. What are the standards which are being applied to determine whether a person has met the relevant level of competence?
- iii. What aspect of the process are methods of assessment of whether those standards have been met?

Note: A competence standard is distinct from an academic standard or course requirement. It should contain a set of defined skills or ability and apply a clear objective metric for assessing the required skill or ability. *(For ease of reference the Doctoral and MPhil Assessment Criteria are available in Appendix 1 of this document)*

Section 3 Disability and Implications for Study

A range of [short guides](#) are available covering a range of disabilities, and provide information on supporting disabled students, including those with long-term health and mental health conditions. These guides are especially useful for supporting students who have not yet been assessed for a Student Support Plan (SSP).

There is also the [Supportive Practice Tool](#), which is an at-a-glance resource that aims to support inclusive practice in the University setting.

3.1 Student Support Plan (SSP)

A Student Support Plan (SSP) is a document that outlines information about a PGR student and specifies the adjustments required to ensure their access to and participation in teaching, learning, and assessment, and any outside study activity related to the PGR student's research project. It includes a summary of the PGR student's disability. SSPs are intended to be working documents that can be reviewed and updated as needed to accommodate changes in the PGR student's circumstances or to address any barriers to study that persist despite current adjustments.

Where a PGR student has an SSP, it should include information on the reasonable adjustments required during the student lifecycle that includes common areas such as:

- Registration/Induction
- Project approval
- Supervision arrangements
- Supervisor feedback
- Work/study spaces
- Conference attendance
- Outside Study Activities, including fieldwork, placement, archive visits, etc
- Annual Progress Review
- Thesis Submission
- Examination preparation, including the oral examination

Where a separate referral to Occupational Health has been made by the School, this should be considered in conjunction with an SSP. Where relevant the SSP should also include agreed adjustments following an Occupational Health referral where the adjustment relates to aspects of the PGR student's studies.

All colleagues receiving an SSP for a PGR student must ensure that the recommended adjustments are both clear and feasible to implement. Any concerns regarding the practicality of implementing the adjustments should be referred to the [Disability Service](#).

3.2 Carer's Passport

The Equality Act 2010 requires that no student is discriminated against or treated less favourably because of an association with another person who has a protected characteristic, and this includes unpaid carers. "A carer is anyone who cares, unpaid, for a friend or family member who due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction cannot cope without their support." [Carers Trust](#).

PGR students who are identified as unpaid carers are eligible to explore support with Newcastle University and assessment for a Carers Passport. A Carers Passport is like an SSP and identifies appropriate support and flexibility during PGR studies.

3.3 Flexible Study

PGR students may need to consider flexible study options because of something arising from their disability. For example, having a condition that means they need to study at a slower pace, or have a fluctuating health or mental health condition. It is important that the PGR student can make an informed decision, that may include change to mode of study, and extension or interruption to studies.

Please refer to information about [change of circumstances](#) on the PGR regulation and policies webpages and [guidance for PGR students](#).

3.4 Medical Leave

The PGR student may experience disability-related illness and/or need to attend disability-related appointments. That disability-related appointments are varied and can include but not limited to:

- NHS treatment
- GP or Consultant appointments
- Counselling/Therapy services
- specialist support services for Drug/Alcohol addiction or eating disorder.

That requests for medical leave should not exceed 28 weeks in any twelve-month period.

3.5 Interruption of Studies

The PGR student may experience a disability-related illness or fluctuation of a disability-related health or mental health condition where an interruption of studies may be appropriate to allow for recovery or improvement that reduces the impact on their day-to-day life, including studies. There must be careful consideration to the length of interruption to reasonably allow for recovery or improvement in the PGR student's disability-related illness or fluctuation of a disability-related health or mental health condition.

Interruptions are not normally more than twelve months, and overall maximum candidature would not normally be extended for more than three years by an interruption, extension or a combination of the two. (Interruptions for parental leave do not count towards this.) However, where a longer interruption would allow recovery or improvement the PG Dean could consider this.

3.6 Change of Candidature

The PGR student may request a change of candidature from full-time to part-time study, and this can be a reasonable adjustment arising because of their disability, particularly where the PGR student is planning to study between 50% and 90% of usual candidature FTE. There should be no restriction on a PGR student making requests to change candidature where it is considered as part of a reasonable adjustment. Where a change of candidature is required, the Disability Team should liaise with the Graduate School to discuss the most appropriate candidature option for the PGR student.

The University does not normally support study at less than part-time (50% FTE) candidature. However, this could be considered where it is recommended as a reasonable adjustment, provided it is determined that the aims of the project are still academically feasible over a longer timescale and the PGR student remains reasonably likely to succeed in the qualification.

There may however be reasons why an adjustment to candidature cannot be provided, such as Visa restrictions for PGR Student Visa Holders or where part-time study cannot be accommodated within the programme of study. The Graduate School should be contacted to provide guidance on changes of candidature where it is being recommended as a reasonable adjustment.

3.7 Extensions

An extension to maximum candidature (thesis submission deadline) may be considered as part of a reasonable adjustment where for example it is identified the PGR student is studying at a slower pace because of their disability. There must be careful consideration to the length of extension needed and that an extension will be effective in addressing the disability related impact on study such as slower pace of study. Where an extension is recommended as a reasonable adjustment this should be included in the SSP. The length of an extension will not normally extend beyond one calendar year.

3.8 Occupational Health

A referral to Occupational Health (OH) may be required for a PGR student where:

- A workspace assessment is required because of a disability or long-term health or mental health condition;
- As part of a normal health referral for the research programme;
- To inform support and adjustments needed for a PGR student undertaking paid work under a specific teaching contract or via Student Employment on Campus (SEOC).

OH recommendations should be reviewed by the Academic Unit and/or Graduate School before they are agreed upon and where needed a case meeting can be arranged to include the Disability Service, Graduate School and Academic Unit to review the OH recommendations, before they are agreed upon and implemented by the Academic Unit. If a PGR student has engaged with the Occupational Health (OH) recommendations or consents to sharing them with the Disability Service, the Academic Unit should provide the details of the recommended or agreed OH adjustments related to the student's PGR studies to the Disability Service. This will ensure the PGR student's SSP is updated to include the OH adjustments.

3.9 Support to Study

If a PGR student has a temporary or long-term health condition, mental health condition or disability, which is impacting adversely on their ability to study, an Academic Unit or the Student Health & Wellbeing Service may choose to support the PGR student under the Support to Study Policy 2025-256 and the Support to Study Procedure 2025-26. This is usually separate and distinct from any support offered to a student directly by the Student Health and Wellbeing Service (Disability).

There are different levels of support:

- **Level 1:** Initial informal support, usually provided by the Supervisory Team (for example, through additional supervisory meetings).
- **Level 2:** More formal support may be put in place if the measures under Level 1 are not sufficient. A meeting will usually be held with the PGR student to discuss their circumstances and agree an Action Plan.
- **Level 3:** When earlier support actions have not been successful in enabling a PGR student to continue with their studies, or it is believed your health may be at risk, formal intervention by an impartial Support to Study Panel may be organised.

The Support to Study Policy and accompanying procedure seek to promote early intervention, and a consistent, supportive and collaborative approach to responding to concerns raised about any registered student who, due to ongoing health issues or disability, is struggling to study or function within an educative environment.

It aims to ensure that students experiencing difficulties as a result of disability or significant ill health are provided with appropriate support to study at the correct level.

The Supervisor, academic unit, Graduate School or Student Health and Wellbeing may consider the [Support to Study](#) procedure where appropriate to identify and provide additional support to the PGR student through a focused action plan.

Note: an action plan might, for example, break down a task into smaller components and set a deadline for the PGR student to complete for review at the next Support to Study meeting.

3.10 Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs)

A PGR student may be eligible to receive DSAs if provided through their studentship (e.g. UKRI studentships -[UKRI guidance](#)) or if they are a self-funded UK student through [Government scheme](#). This is a non-means tested grant that can provide needed equipment, human support and help with travel costs where use of public transport may impact.

Eligible PGR students are normally required to attend an independent study needs assessment and a report is issued to the University with a list of recommendations. These are normally reviewed by the Disability Service (in collaboration with the relevant Graduate School for UKRI funded students) prior to the recommended equipment or support services being provided. Where a studentship does not allocate specific DSA funding, all reasonable support costs will fall to the University. There is a central fund managed by Student Health and Wellbeing for the cost of human support e.g. sighted guide, note taker, specialist mentor, specialised equipment and/or software. All other reasonable costs for adjustments such as accessible workstation, alternative format of information etc should be considered by the Academic Unit and/or Faculty.

Note: The University **should not wait** for DSAs funding to be in place before providing needed support. It may be appropriate for the University to put in place interim support such as specialist mentoring, to avoid unnecessary delay in implementing reasonable adjustments. Colleagues should refer to Section 2 for information on adjustments that can be considered. [The Disability Service](#) can also provide advice and guidance and assess interim support needs for a PGR student.

Section 4 Roles and Responsibilities

4.1 Disability Service, Student Health and Wellbeing

The Disability Service (DS) is charged on behalf of the University with assessing the individual needs of disabled students and documenting the agreed reasonable adjustments via a Student Support Plan (SSP). The process the DS should take is as follows:

1. For PGR students who declare a disability, including long-term health or mental health condition or neurodiverse condition, the DS will receive and review all information available for the purpose of identifying individual supports and reasonable adjustments.
2. The DS should support PGR students where eligible, to apply for Disabled Students' Allowances via the appropriate funding body.
3. The DS, after reviewing all information provided by the PGR student, should arrange a case meeting involving the supervisor(s), and other appropriate Academic Unit/Graduate School colleagues as needed, to review the proposed reasonable adjustments to determine their

practicality and agree the responsibility for their implementation. The agreed reasonable adjustments should then be documented in a Student Support Plan (SSP).

4. The DS should then share the SSP with the PGR student for approval. Following approval by the PGR student, the DS will release the SSP to all colleagues responsible for implementing the agreed support and reasonable adjustments.
5. Where a case meeting was not arranged with the supervisor(s) or other appropriate colleagues prior to drafting an SSP, it is the responsibility of the DS to contact and/or share the drafted SSP with the Graduate School and Academic Unit to ask them to review the proposed adjustments. Once agreed, the DS should arrange a case meeting to include the PGR student to support implementation of the agreed support and reasonable adjustments.
6. The DS should set up identified study skills or interim specialist mentoring support in lieu of either DSAs provision or where the funding of external support normally provided through DSAs falls to the University.
7. The DS should send the PGR student an automated check-in 3 months after an SSP has been implemented to invite the PGR student to confirm adjustments are a) working well or b) require review.
8. The DS should send an automated termly check-in email to all PGR students that have declared a disability or have an SSP in place.
9. The DS should contact year 1 PGR students 6 months after first registration to check that no further reasonable adjustments are required for the first APR.
10. The DS should support review of the PGR student's reasonable adjustments at key points in the PGR journey, specifically Annual Progress Review and thesis submission to ensure all needed reasonable adjustments are in place for the oral examination and are communicated to examiners.

4.2 Graduate Schools

The relevant Graduate School should:

1. Authorise a PGR student's access to DSAs needs assessment for UKRI or other DSAs funded studentships, and where the DS identify that an independent needs assessment would benefit the PGR student, and Newcastle University regarding its duty under the EA 2010.
2. Give final approval for DSAs expenditure under UKRI or other DSAs funded studentships.
3. Respond to DS queries about UKRI regulations in relation to reasonable adjustments and support for disabled PGR students.
4. Advise DS where required on internal rules and regulations for research study, including assessment criteria.
5. Review agreed reasonable adjustments documented in SSPs and take responsibility to make adjustments that sit within the Graduate School remit, e.g., extensions to thesis submission deadline, sharing information about adjustments for the oral examination with all examiners.

4.3 Academic Unit

The Academic Unit should:

1. Consult and liaise with the DS, supervisor(s) and relevant Graduate School where needed in relation to reasonable adjustments and support for a PGR student.
2. Refer a PGR student for an OH assessment for PGR workspace or work-based roles within the Academic Unit.

3. Purchase approved DSAs equipment and/or human support such as specialist mentoring, and travel.
4. Give final approval for OH workspace or work-based recommendations.
5. Advise the Project Approval or APR panels of reasonable adjustments documented in the PGR student's SSP.
6. Notify the DS and supervisor(s) where a review of reasonable adjustments may be needed following an APR.

4.4 Supervisor(s)

Supervisor(s) have a pivotal relationship with the PGR student and may receive information directly from the PGR student that acts as a first declaration of a disability to the University, and the impact of a disability, or likelihood of a disability, on their studies. It is expected supervisor(s) act on the information provided by the PGR student that indicates individual reasonable adjustments may be needed. Supervisor(s) should:

1. Anticipate the needs of disabled PGR students and where practical implement best practice adjustments set out in Section 3 of this guidance.
2. Consult with the DS on appropriate interim reasonable adjustments for a disabled PGR student.
3. Refer a PGR student declaring a disability to the DS for assessment and the creation of an individualised SSP.
4. Participate in case meetings with the DS to discuss and agree on a range of reasonable adjustments for a PGR student, considering the impact of the PGR student's disability, the practicality of the adjustments, and the specific research competencies required.
5. Where an SSP has been issued, promptly raise any concerns about the implementation of reasonable adjustments with the DS.
6. Participate in case meetings arranged by the DS and with the PGR student to discuss the implementation of agreed reasonable adjustments, and/or to review individual reasonable adjustments throughout PGR studies.
7. At the start of each academic year during a scheduled supervisory meeting, ensure that the disabled PGR student is satisfied with their reasonable adjustments. Check in with the PGR student at regular supervisory meetings regarding reasonable adjustments and if there are any issues refer to DS.

4.5 PGR Student

Whilst responsibility falls to the University to anticipate and make decisions about individual reasonable adjustments, the PGR student is invited to engage with the University to provide information to inform its decision making. To support the University the PGR student may assist by:

1. Sharing information about their disability, long term health or mental health condition, or neurodiverse condition to support Newcastle University to identify and make individual reasonable adjustments for them.
2. Attending arranged case meetings to discuss and/or review their individual support needs.
3. Engaging with the DS to create an individualized SSP to document agreed reasonable adjustments and support.
4. Reviewing and approving their draft SSP issued by DS.
5. Advising the DS, Academic Unit or Supervisor(s) where adjustments are not sufficient.
6. Where eligible attend an independent study needs assessment to access DSAs support.

7. Engaging in OH assessments where needed.
8. Responding to check-ins by DS, Academic Unit, Supervisor(s) and OH in relation to their reasonable adjustments.

(Appendix 2 PGR SSP Process Map provides a visual overview of the process.)

Section 5 Examples of Reasonable Adjustments for Doctoral and MPhil Students

The following are examples of possible reasonable adjustments that may be included in a Student Support Plan and put in place to support a PGR student. These examples are not exhaustive.

5.1 Reasonable Adjustments relating to Workspace

- Considering whether any adjustments are required to workspace (office/desk/seating/lab/lighting).

5.2 Reasonable Adjustments relating to Supervision

The following adjustments may be considered to adapt supervisory support as a specific reasonable adjustment arising from an SSP. The list has been divided into routine and exceptional.

Supervisory Meetings/Discussions

Routine:

- Agreeing a clear structure to supervision meetings so the PGR student knows what to expect, perhaps providing notes and questions in advance of discussions and whether recording supervision meetings would be helpful.
- Considering frequency of meetings, would more meetings be helpful to the PGR student to track progress and seek clarifications on feedback on writing.
- Considering timing of meetings if a particular time of day is better for the PGR student in terms of energy/engagement
- Considering communication preferences at the start of meetings/projects and remaining open to adjusting communication methods—such as rephrasing, summarising, or visual aids—to support engagement. Being mindful of tone, pace, and delivery to ensure messages are accessible and inclusive
- Remaining silent whilst the PGR student makes use of extended thinking time to absorb new ideas or material introduced in the discussion. Don't rephrase or repeat unless the PGR student indicates this is needed.
- Watching for signs of stress/anxiety/fatigue and suggest breaks in discussions if needed to help with energy levels, sensory overload and anxiety.

Exceptional:

- Considering location, e.g. an uncluttered room to avoid distraction, lighting levels, near to toilets and drinking water
- Considering meeting format, online / in person. Contributing via chat can be helpful if verbalising becomes more difficult.
- Use of mind mapping techniques / flip charts and diagrams, to support organisation of volume of material, and to support the development of the argumentation through the thesis as a whole.
- Developing notes and prompt cards to facilitate discussion of thesis overall.

- Inclusion of some Joint meetings between supervisor, PGR student and disability support workers.
- Providing a summary of feedback/actions in writing, or permitting the PGR student to record a summary or key actions.

5.3 Reasonable Adjustments relating to Academic Writing/Editing Skills

- Signposting the PGR student to the Academic Skills Kit <https://www.ncl.ac.uk/academic-skills-kit/> (or other support) for advice on developing their academic skills, in relation to development of other editing skills, for example:
 - Supporting the PGR student with editing, not just sentence and paragraph structure, demonstrating what is wrong and showing how such issues can be fixed
 - Reverse outlining to help draw out structural clarity of longer pieces of writing, or printing it out and cutting it up into pieces to rearrange; or using diagrams to visualise the flow of the text; using navigation pane to be able to see sub-heading structure at a glance when working through long texts.
 - Scaffolding/ structured approach to writing to build confidence in writing skills (SRHE Report)
 - Note taking techniques e.g. structured note pages, colour coding etc.

5.4 Reasonable Adjustments relating to Oral Examination Preparation

If the original SSP has not covered the examination process, the SSP should be reviewed in advance of the oral examination, normally as soon as possible following submission of the thesis.

Any proposed reasonable adjustments for the examination should be discussed with the Graduate School and Supervisor/s. Once the adjustments have been agreed they will be formally shared with the Graduate School, Supervisor/s and Examiners in advance of the oral examination, normally approximately three weeks. This is to allow sufficient time to ensure the reasonable adjustments are in place and respond to any queries about the reasonable adjustments. Where a reasonable adjustment is recommended at short notice (less than three weeks) it may be necessary to consider moving the date of the oral examination, to provide sufficient time to put the adjustment in place.

The following are examples of possible reasonable adjustments:

Routine and Exceptional

- Arrange a mock oral examination to provide the PGR student with experience of the oral examination experience, help the PGR student to prepare for the defence of their thesis, and provide an opportunity to see if the reasonable adjustments are working.
- Provide guidance in a range of format , such as digital to allow user to modify/use screen readers, large print where needed. .
- Involve the PGR student in the arrangements for the oral examination, e.g., type of venue, time of day, so they are provided with advance notification of the venue. This would allow the PGR student to make themselves familiar with the venue's location, as well as the venue itself, which should help alleviate anxiety or uncertainty around an unfamiliar environment. However, the arrangements should be made by the supervisor and should not be delegated to the PGR student
- Providing an outline schedule for the day of the oral examination so the PGR student knows what to expect.
- Appointment of an Independent Chair to ensure the implementation of any agreed reasonable adjustments for the oral examination.
- Where reasonable adjustments have been recommended for the oral examination itself (for example, rest breaks every hour), the Independent Chair would be expected to ensure all

attendees are aware of these at the start of the oral examination and that the adjustments are acted upon during the oral examination.

- Where the oral examination is taking place by video-link, ensure the PGR student (and other attendees) are comfortable with the technology to be used.
- Graduate Schools to liaise with examiners and provide initial questions/areas of questioning in advance of the oral examination.
- Provide a quiet space for the PGR student to prepare themselves for the oral examination if taking place in-person, out of range of preliminary discussions between the Examiners and/or the Supervisory Team.

The **Handbook for Examiners of Research Degrees** provides additional good practice guidance to support examiners and is available at: <https://www.ncl.ac.uk/student-progress/pgr/publications/>

Section 6 Support and Further Information

Policy and Guidance maintained by Doctoral College, Registry and Education Service and was published in January 2026. Any queries on this policy and guidance should be directed to doctoralcollege@ncl.ac.uk.

Guidance on reasonable adjustments: disabilityadvisor@newcastle.ac.uk

Graduate Schools

FMS Graduate School

- Translational & Clinical Research Institute: TCRIpgenquiries@newcastle.ac.uk
- Newcastle Biosciences Institute: NUBIpgenquiries@newcastle.ac.uk
- Population Health Sciences Institute: PHSIpgenquiries@newcastle.ac.uk

HaSS and SAgE Graduate School – gradschool@ncl.ac.uk

Appendix 1 – Doctoral and MPhil Assessment Criteria

Criteria for Research Degrees

The [Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies](#) set out the requirements for all degree qualifications in the UK.

For all research degrees, the work presented for examination should be:

- **Original:** the work should be your own, all sources should be properly referenced, and you should not use anyone else's work without acknowledging it appropriately;
- **Scholarly:** the work should demonstrate an in-depth knowledge of the topic, and you should be able to demonstrate that you have applied critical thinking in your assessment of the evidence and wider literature. Any sources used should be cited consistently, accurately and correctly within both the text and the bibliography;
- **Professional:** you should be able to demonstrate that you have a good understanding of your role in relation to the wider research process and that you are capable of conducting research within the standard ethical practices of your subject area;
- **Well-structured, written and presented:** or, in the case of alternative research submissions (such as compositions, exhibitions, artefacts or other products arising from the research), arranged and presented in an orderly and coherent way.

Criteria for Doctoral Degrees

To be awarded a doctoral degree, you need to demonstrate your ability to:

- Understand and interpret complex information;
- Contribute new knowledge through original research and advanced scholarship;
- Show a thorough and systematic understanding of the existing knowledge within your field of research;
- Critically evaluate and test theories and relate them to a wider body of knowledge;
- Understand appropriate research techniques, methods and approaches and how these can be adopted and applied to your field of enquiry;
- Design and manage a research project;
- Produce research outputs at a standard high enough for publication, performance or exhibition.

Criteria for MPhil Degrees

MPhils are normally more focused or limited in scope than a doctoral degree. Relative to the doctoral degree, the MPhil will have less emphasis on an original contribution to knowledge and need not be worthy of publication, performance or exhibition.

To be awarded an MPhil, you need to demonstrate your ability to:

- Show a thorough and systematic understanding of the existing knowledge within your field of research;
- Evaluate and engage critically with current research and advanced scholarship;
- Understand appropriate research techniques, methods and approaches and how these can be adopted and applied to your field of enquiry;

- Design and manage a research project which demonstrates your understanding of how to conduct research.

(The above is an extract from the Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes. The full document is available [here](#).)

Appendix 2 – PGR SSP Process Map

