

## IX. Master of Philosophy Assessment Regulations

### A. Scope

1. These *Assessment Regulations* apply to all candidates of Newcastle University who, having met the requirements of the University's *General Regulations* and of the *Master of Philosophy Degree Regulations*, are eligible to submit a thesis for examination for the degree of Master of Philosophy. The basis for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy to staff candidates will be the same as the basis for the award of the degree to student candidates.

These regulations use Academic Unit as an overarching term for School and Institute.

*Where reference is made to any named University role, this also includes their nominees.*

### B. Appointment of Examiners

2. Your thesis will be examined by Examiners appointed by the Dean of Postgraduate Studies on behalf of Senate.

3. There will ordinarily be one External Examiner and one Internal Examiner appointed for you. However, in certain circumstances two External Examiners will be appointed (for example, if you are a staff candidate and have been employed in parallel at the University for the majority of your candidature) and the [Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes](#) provides further information on these circumstances.

4. All Examiners will be nominated by your Supervisory Team on behalf of the Head of Academic Unit, considering any potential conflicts of interest and in accordance with the criteria for appointment set out in the [Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes](#). You will have an opportunity to comment on the proposed Examiners. If you believe that there is a conflict of interest, it should be drawn to the attention of your Supervisory Team, Head of Academic Unit, or Graduate School, as soon as possible. Examiner appointments will only be reviewed if it is clear there may be bias or prejudice by an Examiner.

5. Examiner nominations will be submitted by your Supervisory Team, following submission of your thesis title for approval. This should normally be three months before your thesis is submitted, so that Examiners are fully appointed by the time of your thesis submission. (*The [Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes](#) provides further detail in the section 'Criteria for Appointment of Examiners'.*)

6. Where the University is unable to appoint, or chooses not to appoint, an Internal Examiner, a second External Examiner will be appointed.

7. In all cases where two External Examiners are appointed, the Dean of Postgraduate Studies will also appoint an independent member of University staff who will chair the oral examination. The Independent Chair will normally be from outside your or your Supervisory Team's subject area. The Independent Chair does not examine the thesis but provides guidance on University regulations and procedures to ensure that your oral examination is

conducted in accordance with normal University practice. The Independent Chair is required to be present for the duration of the oral examination, including pre and post oral examination discussions. (The [Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes](#) provides further detail in the section 'Criteria for Appointment of Examiners')

8. A former member of staff of the University will not normally be appointed as an External Examiner until at least five years have elapsed since that person left the employment of the University. A retired member of staff of the University will not normally be appointed as an External Examiner. A retired member of staff of another institution may be appointed as an External Examiner only if they are still active in the field of research and study concerned.

### **C. Following Thesis Submission**

9. The University cannot guarantee the examination of your thesis immediately after its submission. On submission of your thesis to your Graduate School, a [number of checks](#) are undertaken before your thesis is sent to your examiners for review. The normal period between submission of a thesis and an examination is ten weeks, although circumstances may necessitate a longer time frame. The Graduate School will keep you informed should the examination process extend beyond the normal ten-week period.

10. If following receipt of your thesis, in certain circumstances your Graduate School may need to return your thesis to you so that it can be updated:

- a) Where the thesis is not in an examinable state, e.g. word count over length, or has been formatted incorrectly.
- b) Where the thesis has not adequately referenced (e.g. self-plagiarism) but this has not been deemed sufficient to follow the Academic Misconduct procedure.

In such cases, you would be provided with one month to make the required changes to the thesis. During this period, you would remain under examination and no fee would be payable.

### **D. Nature of the Examination**

11. The examination will consist of a review and assessment of your thesis by the appointed Examiners and normally of an oral examination on the contents of the thesis and related subjects. The oral examination will normally be chaired by the Internal Examiner, where an Independent Chair has not been appointed, but the examiners should discuss and agree the chairing arrangements during their pre-meeting, in advance of the start of the oral examination.

- a) The normal practice will be that an oral examination is convened unless the External Examiner contacts the Graduate School to confirm that the oral examination is not required.
- b) In the event of a disagreement between Examiners about the need for an oral examination, then the oral examination will be held.

- c) It should be noted that the Examiners cannot make the recommendation of a fail without giving you the opportunity of an oral examination.

12. The oral examination will be conducted in accordance with the guidelines in the University's [Handbook for Examiners of Research Degrees](#).

The purpose of the oral examination will be to enable the examiners to:

- a) establish that the research has been undertaken by you;
- b) test your ability to defend your thesis;
- c) establish whether you have a satisfactory knowledge of the wider field surrounding the research topic.

13. In examining your thesis, the Examiners should take into account the assessment criteria detailed in the 'Criteria for the Master of Philosophy' section of the University's [Handbook for Examiners of Research Degrees](#).

14. In the case of any work done jointly, or in wider collaborations, or under direction, it is important that the extent of your own contribution is made clear in the Examination Entry Form as well as in your thesis, both in any introductory element of the thesis and at relevant points within the thesis.

## **E. Examiners' Preliminary Reports**

15. Your Examiners should independently write a preliminary report indicating their provisional assessment of your thesis and of the issues to be explored in the oral examination, if required. It is expected that, if the criteria for the award of the degree have clearly been met, the preliminary reports will be brief. However, if your Examiners have serious concerns about whether the criteria have been met, fuller reports will be expected.

16. Each examiner's preliminary report should be sent to the Graduate School in advance of an oral examination taking place. Examiners should not consult with each other before both independent reports have been submitted to the Graduate School. The reports will be forwarded to the Dean of Postgraduate Studies. They must not be shown to you or your Supervisory Team in advance of the oral examination. However, Examiners should be aware that preliminary reports will be made available to you after the oral examination, if requested by you, under the provisions of the UK GDPR and The Data Protection Act 2018 Act.

17. Exceptionally, and two weeks or more in advance of a scheduled oral examination, if the External Examiner upon initial independent review of the thesis is unequivocally of the view that the thesis is not worthy of defence without significant re-work by you, they will contact the Graduate School. The Dean of Postgraduate Studies will then determine whether it is appropriate for extraordinary arrangements to be put in place to allow your Examiners to confer before the oral examination. If approved by the Dean of Postgraduate Studies, your Examiners will be asked to prepare a joint report. The decision reached under these arrangements will be limited to Regulation 30b only, i.e., recommending resubmission with an oral examination.

## **F. Personal Extenuating Circumstances and Adjustments for Oral Examination**

18. Following submission of your thesis, if you are aware of any circumstances that may prevent you from attending the oral examination (where one is required), these should be brought to the attention of your Supervisory Team and/or the Graduate School immediately, to determine if it necessary to delay the oral examination.

19. If you have a Student Support Plan, this should be reviewed at the point of thesis submission to ensure that any appropriate reasonable adjustments are in place in advance of the oral examination and your Examiners are informed of these.

20. If you do not have a Student Support Plan but when preparing for your oral examination you believe you will require adjustments to your oral examination due to your personal, cultural, health reasons, you should contact your Supervisory Team and/or the Graduate School. The Graduate School will discuss your requirements with you and where appropriate seek approval for any adjustments from the Dean of Postgraduate Studies and inform your Examiners of these.

21. If you experience unexpected personal circumstances which you believe could impact on your performance at the oral examination, you should contact your Supervisory Team and/or the Graduate School. The Graduate School will discuss your situation with you and consider whether any adjustments are required and where appropriate seek approval for these from the Dean of Postgraduate Studies and inform your Examiners of these.

22. Irrespective of your personal circumstances, your Examiners will be expected to assess you against the Master of Philosophy assessment criteria.

23. By attending an oral examination, you are declaring that you are fit to attend the examination and, as such, it is unlikely that you would be able to submit a later claim that your performance was affected by personal circumstances.

## **G. Role of your Supervisory Team during the Examination**

24. A member of your Supervisory Team will not be appointed as an Internal Examiner.

25. The Supervisory Team will co-ordinate the arrangements for the oral examination, where required, and inform the Graduate School of the date, in advance of the oral examination taking place.

26. There should normally be no discussion about the oral examination, between the Supervisory Team and your Examiners in advance of the oral examination.

27. Under no circumstances should your Supervisory Team send the electronic copy of your thesis direct to the Examiners. All formal submissions (first submission and any further submission as determined by the examination outcome) should be sent to the Graduate School, which will send the submission to the Examiners.

28. A member of your Supervisory Team may at your request be present at the oral examination (but will make no contribution to). They should in all cases be available to be consulted by the Examiners during the oral examination. The Supervisory Team will have the right to confer with the Examiners following the oral examination, and to be given an oral report on its outcome.

## **H. Your Role during the Examination**

29. Under no circumstances should the arrangements for the oral examination be delegated to you.

30. There should normally be no discussion about the oral examination, or direct contact between you and your Examiners in advance of the oral examination, where required.

31. Following the oral examination there should continue to be no direct contact between you and your Examiners. If you require clarification on points raised by the Examiners, this clarification should be sought via your Supervisory Team.

32. Under no circumstances should you send the electronic copy of your thesis direct to your Examiners. All formal submissions (first submission and any further submission as determined by the examination outcome) should be sent to the Graduate School, which will send the submission to the Examiners.

## **J. Examiners' Final Reports**

33. Having considered all the evidence presented to them, your Examiners will submit a Joint Report form on your examination. The report will include a written statement concerning your performance together with a recommendation as to the outcome of your examination. The report should also address directly any concerns raised in the preliminary reports and make clear the areas required for amendment if your Examiners are recommending corrections/revisions or a resubmission (See Regulations 40-44).

34. The Joint Report form must be sent to the Graduate School, which will forward the report to the Dean of Postgraduate Studies for consideration and confirmation that due process has been followed. Exceptionally, the Dean of Postgraduate Studies may require further information from the Examiners to justify their recommendation. After consideration and approval of the Joint Report and recommendation by the Dean of Postgraduate Studies, the Graduate School will send a copy to you, your Supervisory Team and your Head of Academic Unit (*unless there is disagreement between the Examiners, see Section M Disagreement between the Examiners below.*).

35. Where two External Examiners have examined the thesis and it is agreed that revisions are required in the recommendation 36aii, they should agree between them which Examiner will receive the revised thesis and ensure that the required revisions have been made.

*Note: that Preliminary Reports and a Joint Report should be completed for all examinations requiring the input of both Examiners. This applies to both first submission and resubmission.*

## **K. Recommendations Open to the Examiners**

36. Following your first submission and examination, the Examiners may make the following recommendations:

- ai. that you be admitted to the degree of Master of Philosophy;
- a.ii. that you be admitted to the degree of Master of Philosophy subject to minor corrections (e.g., of detail or presentation) or minor revisions of the text (e.g., more substantial than minor corrections, but not involving a major revision of the thesis/doctoral statement) made to the satisfaction of the Internal Examiner, within a period of six months of receiving formal notification of the corrections to be made;
- b. that you have not satisfied the Examiners in the oral examination and or thesis. You are permitted to revise and resubmit the thesis within twelve months for re-examination by both Examiners and be re-examined orally, if the Examiners so require by indication in their joint report;
- c. that no degree be awarded and that you are adjudged to have failed.

### **Minor Revisions or Corrections**

37. Recommendation 36a may be made subject to a requirement that you make minor corrections or revisions to your thesis before the deposit of an electronic copy of the thesis in the University Library in accordance with the [Section XIV Rules for Form of Theses and Submission of Work for Higher Degrees](#).

38. Where minor corrections or revisions are required, you will be advised by the Graduate School that these must be made within six months of receiving formal notification of the corrections to be made. It will be the responsibility of the Internal Examiner (or nominated External Examiner) to certify that the necessary corrections have been made before a pass list can be issued.

39. The expectation is that your thesis will not require referral back to the External Examiner and that you will not be expected to undergo a further oral examination. However, if the Internal Examiner (or nominated External Examiner) feels that any recommendation other than recommendation 36ai is appropriate following reconsideration of the thesis after the minor revisions have been made, the thesis will also be referred to the External Examiner. Where a thesis is referred to the External Examiner, the Examiners may determine that a further oral examination is required and may subsequently make any of the recommendations normally open following full revision and resubmission as set out in Regulation 36 above.

### **Resubmission for Re-examination by Internal and External Examiners**

40. Where you are permitted to revise and resubmit a thesis in accordance with Regulation 36b the recommendations open to Examiners are those set out in Regulation 36ai, 36a.ii, or 36c only.

41. It is the normal expectation that the same examiners will be used for the resubmission of a thesis. If this is not possible, for example due to retirement of an examiner, a new examiner will need to be appointed. Your supervisor should contact the Graduate School to arrange for the replacement Examiner.

Advice can be sought from the Graduate School in these circumstances. Where an Examiner is replaced, the recommendation and revisions required by the original Examiners will guide the examination of the resubmitted thesis.

42. Your Examiners will indicate in their original joint report if they require an oral examination upon resubmission of your thesis. Where your oral performance on the first occasion of examination was satisfactory, your Examiners may determine that a further oral examination is not required, and they will be able to submit their resubmission recommendation without re-examining you orally.

43. However, if your Examiners feel that a further oral examination is required on review of your resubmitted thesis, they should contact the Graduate School of this requirement, so that the appropriate arrangements can be made.

44. At resubmission, you must provide a written report indicating the changes you have made to your thesis in response to the requirements of the Examiners.

#### **Extension to Deadlines**

45. In exceptional cases, an extension of time for making the required revisions, corrections or resubmission may be granted by the Dean of Postgraduate Studies, subject to you providing a strong justification and evidence supported by your Supervisory Team. Requests to extend your deadline must be submitted, in advance of your current corrections or resubmission deadline.

#### **Information about Corrections/Revisions Required or Resubmission**

46. In all cases where you are required to make corrections/revisions to your thesis or resubmit your thesis, it will be the responsibility of your Examiners to provide full details of the corrections and/or revisions required of the thesis, but not extending to proof-reading or editing of the thesis. Your Examiners should provide a detailed written statement of the nature of the changes they wish to be made to the thesis, along with their completed Joint Report form. These should be sent to the Graduate School which will formally forward these documents on to you and your Supervisory Team. When forwarding the final report to you, the Graduate School will make it clear that resubmission in itself will not guarantee the award of a qualification.

### **L. Communication of the Result**

47. The Dean of Postgraduate Studies acts as the Chair of the Research Degree Board of Examiners. Examiner recommendations are considered by the Dean of Postgraduate Studies who will then confirm or otherwise these recommendations, following receipt of examiner reports by the Graduate School. The results of the examination or re-examination will then be communicated formally to you by the Graduate School.

In any case where an Examiner chooses to provide you with an informal indication of their recommendation, the Examiner concerned must stress that the recommendation is subject to ratification by the Dean of Postgraduate Studies. Only the Graduate School, on behalf of the Academic Registrar, is empowered to issue an official result and provide you with this.

## **M. Disagreement between the Examiners**

48. If there is a disagreement between the Examiners or doubt about their intentions, they will be consulted by the Dean of Postgraduate Studies with a view to resolving the matter. Where there is irreconcilable disagreement between the Examiners an additional External Examiner will be appointed.

49. The additional External Examiner will be asked to read your thesis and to conduct an oral examination. The additional External Examiner will be told that the previous Examiners had failed to reach agreement but will not have sight of their reports. On the occasion of this oral examination your Supervisory Team (and where appropriate the Internal Examiner) will be available to be consulted by the additional External Examiner. The Dean of Postgraduate Studies will appoint an Independent Chair, who will report on the conduct of the oral examination.

50. The Supervisory Team will co-ordinate the arrangements for the examination. After the conclusion of the examination, the additional External Examiner will make a recommendation which will be final. They will submit a final report to the Graduate School which will, subject to the approval of the Dean of Postgraduate Studies, be forwarded to you and your Supervisory Team in the normal way. In the event that changes to the thesis are required it will be the additional External Examiner who will examine the thesis

51. In the event that *minor corrections or minor revisions are required*, they will need to be made to the satisfaction of the additional External Examiner.

In the event that the recommendation is '*the candidate be permitted to revise and resubmit the thesis within 12 months*', the resubmitted thesis will be examined by the additional External Examiner who will decide whether to conduct a further oral examination.

52. Where a disagreement between Examiners is identified at the examination of a resubmission, the additional External Examiner will be asked to read the candidate's thesis and to consider the work submitted against the Examiners joint report from the first submission. If an oral examination is required for the resubmission the Dean of Postgraduate Studies will appoint an Independent Chair, who will report on the conduct of the viva. After the conclusion of the oral examination, the additional External Examiner will make a recommendation which will be final. They will submit a final report which will, subject to the approval of the Dean of Postgraduate Studies, be forwarded to the candidate and the supervisory team in the normal way. In the event that minor corrections or revisions are required, they will need to be made to the satisfaction of the additional External Examiner.

53. Where you are subject to the procedure set out in Regulations 48 and 49) you will be informed that the Examiners originally appointed have disagreed and that an additional External Examiner will be appointed. You will not be informed as to the nature of the disagreement between the original Examiners and will not be given a copy of their reports. If, however, you subsequently appeal against the final decision in respect of the award of the degree, the report of the original Examiners will form part of the formal record of appeal. You will be informed that an oral examination will be required. After the oral examination, and once a final decision as to the award of the degree has been

made in accordance with Regulation 51, the final report of the additional examiner will be made available to you and your Supervisory Team, provided that the additional External Examiner's recommendation has been approved.

## **N. Options for the Format of the Oral Examination**

54. It is expected that oral examinations will normally take place with both you and your Examiners present at an approved University campus.

55. However, an online or hybrid (where one or more attendees are online) may be arranged where you and/or your Examiners are not able to be present in person at the University, or where an online or hybrid oral examination is the preferred format. Where an online or hybrid oral examination is arranged the guidelines outlined in the University's [Handbook for Examiners of Research Degrees](#) must be followed to guarantee the integrity of the examination.

56. Your Supervisory Team will normally discuss the oral examination arrangements with you at the point at which your Examiners are nominated. In all cases where the oral examination is online or hybrid, your consent must be obtained. If you choose not to participate in an online or hybrid oral examination you should advise your Graduate School and the examination process will be placed on hold and this may increase the timescale of the examination process.

56. An oral examination may be arranged at a location other than an approved University campus, subject to the approval of the Dean of Postgraduate Studies and your consent must be obtained.

57. A member of your Supervisory Team is not normally expected to attend the oral examination unless at your request, but is expected to be available to be contacted by the Examiners if required.

## **P. Posthumous and Aegrotat Awards**

58. This policy applies in cases where a postgraduate research degree student dies during their research degree programme (Posthumous) or receives the diagnosis of a terminal or debilitating illness that makes completion of the research degree programme impossible, regardless of reasonable adjustments. (Aegrotat).

59. Where a student dies during their research degree programme, consideration may be given to the award of a Posthumous degree where the student's body of work is sufficient to meet the criteria for the award.

60. Where a student receives the diagnosis of a terminal or debilitating illness that makes completion of the research degree programme impossible, regardless of reasonable adjustments, consideration may be given to the award of an Aegrotat degree where the student's body of work is sufficient to meet the criteria for the award

61. Initial queries about an award of a Posthumous or Aegrotat research degree should be made by the Academic Supervisor to the Graduate School Manager who will check the eligibility of the student for a Posthumous or an Aegrotat award by reviewing the student's completed candidature and will indicate which of the following options is to be followed. Requests should be endorsed by the Head of Academic Unit in which the student was registered

and should normally have the support of the student's family. The [Policy on Posthumous and Aegrotat Awards for Postgraduate Research Students](#) provides additional detail.