

Aston University

GRADUATE SCHOOL CODE OF PRACTICE FOR RESEARCH DEGREES

Applicable to students in all years of programmes

Where Regulations are included in the text of this Code of Practice, they are shown in shaded boxes. Unless indicated otherwise, references are to the General Regulations for Degrees by Research and Thesis which are also included as an appendix.

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This document is updated annually; please ensure you are referring to the current version which takes precedence over earlier versions.

1 Foreword

This document is one of a suite of inter-related documents which forms an overall institutional policy for the conduct of research degrees, and which includes the institutional response to the Expectation set out in the Quality Assurance Agency's UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Chapter B11 Research Degrees (June 2012). University staff and students are expected to be familiar with the sections of the University Code of Practice that are particularly relevant to their own responsibilities. The University Code defines minimum standards for research degrees which may be supplemented at the School level by additional advice.

Unless stated otherwise, where Regulations are referred to in the text the references are to the General Regulations for Degrees by Research and Thesis (included in full as Appendix D).

2 Definitions

2.1 Research

The definition of research in this document draws on the definition used in the Research Excellence Framework (REF)¹ which defines research as.

'a process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared.'

'It **includes** work of direct relevance to the needs of commerce, industry, and to the public and voluntary sectors; scholarship²; the invention and generation of ideas, images, performances, artefacts including design, where these lead to new or substantially improved insights; and the use of existing knowledge in experimental development to produce new or substantially improved materials, devices, products and processes, including design and construction. It **excludes** routine testing and routine analysis of materials, components and processes such as for the maintenance of national standards, as distinct from the development of new analytical techniques. It also **excludes** the development of teaching materials that do not embody original research.'

'It **includes** research that is published, disseminated or made publicly available in the form of assessable research outputs, and confidential reports (as defined at paragraph 115 in Part 3, Section 2).'

2.2 Research Programmes

This University Code of Practice is intended to apply to the wide range of research qualifications offered by the University, including MPhil, MD, PhD, professional doctorates, and the University award of MSc/MA (by Research), although not all sections of the document apply equally to all types of research programme.

3 Institutional Arrangements

¹ www.ref.ac.uk; REF 02.2011 'Assessment framework and guidance on submissions'.

² Scholarship for the REF is defined as the creation, development and maintenance of the intellectual infrastructure of subjects and disciplines, in forms such as dictionaries, scholarly editions, catalogues and contributions to major research databases.' Journal articles and monographs are also important forms of scholarship.

3.1 Governance

Head of the Graduate School

The Head of the Graduate School has oversight of research degree provision across the University.

Graduate School Management Committee

The Head of the Graduate School chairs the Graduate School Management Committee (GSMC) which is a sub-committee of the University Research Committee. GSMC is responsible, amongst other things, for:

- all matters concerning the regulation, assurance and enhancement of the quality and standards of research degree programmes including the supervision and examination of research students; and
- monitoring the extent and effectiveness of provision of research training, supervision and other support for research students.

GSMC has academic staff and research student representation from each School.

Associate Dean Research

The role of the Associate Dean Research in each School is to support the School's Executive Dean in matters relating to research, including in respect of research degree programmes.

School Research Committee

The School Research Committee is chaired by the Associate Dean Research. This Committee considers matters relating to research degree programmes and students in the School, and may make recommendations to GSMC. There is a student representative on the School Research Committee.

Programme Director

Most Schools have a Director of Research Degree Programmes who has day-to-day responsibility for research degree programmes and students in the School. In addition, professional doctorates with a taught element have a Programme Director.

3.2 Regulations

Regulations in respect of research degrees are approved by the Senate on the recommendation of the Graduate School Management Committee. Regulations cover:

- a requirements for admission to the programme;
- b procedures for considering claims for the accreditation of prior experiential and/or prior certificated learning (AP(E)L/APL);
- c the academic and procedural requirements for research awards, including supervisory arrangements;
- d the requirements for progression, including monitoring and review arrangements for the award, and the minimum and maximum periods within which the programme may be completed;
- e assessment methods, requirements and procedures, including the criteria for achieving the award;
- f procedures for dealing with research misconduct;³

³ expanded in more detail in the University's Code of Practice for Dealing with Allegations of Research Misconduct, Appendix B

- g information on the University's complaints and appeals processes.

In addition to the General Regulations for Degrees by Research and Thesis, there are also General Regulations for Research Degrees by Staff of Aston University and by Aston University Graduates. These Regulations cover: staff candidates for MPhil, MD and PhD; the degrees of Doctor of Science and Doctor of Letters; and the PhD by Previously Published Work.

General Regulations on the Presentation of Theses provide guidance on the submission of the thesis for examination and post-examination.

The Regulations and codes of practice for research degrees are available to staff, students, applicants, graduates and examiners via the University's website (<http://www1.aston.ac.uk/registry/for-staff/a-to-z-of-registry-services/researchregulationsandprocedures/>). They are also available on the My Aston Portal (MAP) homepage of enrolled students.

3.3 Target Setting and Monitoring

- a Recruitment targets for research degrees are proposed by the Schools and agreed by the University Executive; achievement towards targets is monitored by Associate Deans Research and by Graduate School Management Committee.
- b Graduate School Management Committee receives a number of reports to monitor research degree provision, including:
- i. annual report, by full-time and part-time cohort, of awards and completion times, and withdrawals;
 - ii annual report on student appeals;
 - iii annual summary of comments from External Examiners;
 - iv employment destinations of research students;
 - v Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) results.
- c Research degrees are reviewed on an annual basis by School Research Committees in accordance with the [annual programme review and monitoring policy](#). Factors to be considered by the School Research Committees in the annual programme review process include:
- i recruitment profiles; submission and completion times and rates; pass, referral and fail rates; withdrawal rates;
 - ii analysis of comments from External Examiners;
 - iii feedback from research students, graduates and external stakeholders;
 - iv provision of research and generic skills training;
 - v any appeals or complaints dealt with at the School level.

The University's Research Committee, through the Graduate School Management Committee, ensures that these factors have been given due attention.

- d A School's research degree provision is subject to [periodic review](#) every five years. The periodic review panel includes at least two members who are

external to the University and the panel meets with academic and support staff involved with the programmes, and with research students.

4 The Research Environment

The results from the last national Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) in 2008⁴ confirmed the quality and depth of the University's research:

- all research areas submitted ranked in the top 12 in the UK
- 45% of the research submitted was evaluated as excellent or world-leading
- overall quality had increased since the last RAE in 2001.

The University is committed to only accepting research students into an environment that provides support for doing and learning about research, where excellent research, recognised by the relevant subject community, is occurring and where the appropriate conditions for admission can be met.

'Factors that can be used to indicate excellence in interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary or single-disciplinary research may include:

- demonstrable research achievement as recognised either through peer assessment as internationally excellent or above, or consistently recognised by the award of grants in open competition-with, in both cases, outputs such as journal publications, books and work produced in other media, including engineering, performing arts, sculpture, fine art and design, and other professional practice-based and clinical contexts;
- sufficient numbers of research-active staff, including postdoctoral researchers and research students;
- knowledge exchange and impacts (including knowledge transfer partnerships), with an emphasis on the practical impact of research outcomes and demonstrable ability to attract external funding' (from QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education Chapter B11: Research Degrees).

Maintaining integrity and high standards is of central importance to the University and all members of the University's research community are responsible for maintaining professional standards. The University's Research Integrity: Code of Conduct (Appendix A), prescribes standards of work performance and conduct expected by all persons engaged in research at the University.

Research students are supported by a Graduate Development Team, comprising experts from different areas (including Staff & Graduate Development, Library Services, Careers and Employability Centre, Research Support Office and the Business Partnership Unit) who collectively provide a range of training and development opportunities for research students and research staff.

5 Selection, Admission and Induction of Students

5.1 Selection and Admission

⁴ The results from the next national exercise, the Research Excellence Framework (REF), will be published in December 2014

The selection of research students must follow the requirements set out in the Regulations and any additional criteria set by the School and approved by the appropriate School Research Committee and the Graduate School Management Committee. The admissions criteria should be available to applicants both via the web (<http://www.aston.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/research-programmes/>) and in printed form.

The selection of students should take into account any declared special needs the student may have, and consideration of how such needs may be supported.

Applicants should be interviewed, if necessary by telephone or other means (eg Skype), and should be invited to visit the University. Wherever possible, applicants should have the opportunity to meet with relevant staff and students. Interviews should be conducted by the potential Supervisor and a person independent of the proposed supervisory team.

Consideration of applications should include: whether the proposed area of research will sustain the required level of investigation for the research degree concerned; whether the proposed research can be expected to be completed within the duration permitted for the research degree concerned; the continued availability of required resources, including appropriate supervision, throughout the degree.

Students may only be admitted to a research programme with the involvement of at least two members of University staff, one of whom must be the School's Associate Dean Research or their nominee. Staff responsible for admissions must attend the requisite training provided by the University. Students may only be admitted to the University if their application has been approved by the School's Associate Dean Research or their nominee.

Students must be sent a formal offer letter which should normally include the following information:

- a the expected duration of study;
- b the expectations of the student in terms of attendance, progress reports, contact with supervisors;
- c arrangements for enrolment;
- d references to the University's Regulations, Code of Practice for Research Degrees, student handbook, sources of funding;
- e a clear indication of the financial costs of the programme;
- f the requirements and conditions of any sponsor (if known);
- g reference to practical information, for example concerning accommodation and financial or travel information;
- h the terms and conditions of offer for postgraduate applicants

Other information to be provided early in the students' attendance includes:

- a details of health and safety procedures;
- b University Regulations;
- c Graduate School Student Handbook, including School-specific information;
- d an outline of any opportunities to undertake teaching or other duties and any conditions associated with these, including training requirements;

- e good practice in research and guidance on research ethics;⁵
- f guidance on intellectual property rights.

5.2 Induction

Students will be provided with an appropriate induction programme and introductory material providing details about where they can find essential information. This will include a cross-School Induction to the Graduate School, as well as separate School-specific induction events. The Graduate School induction will comprise presentations from, as a minimum, the Head of the Graduate School, areas represented by the Graduate Development Team, and the University Research Student Society. School induction events will provide an opportunity to meet key staff and other research students in the School.

The student should meet their Supervisor at the earliest opportunity to discuss their respective responsibilities. The Learning Agreement may form the basis of this meeting. For distance learning research students and other students who are away from the campus for a significant part of their research, appropriate arrangements for regular contact will be established and monitored by the Schools.

6 Supervision

Every research student must be supervised by a Supervisor who is a member of the Academic Staff of the University, as defined in Section I of the Statutes of the University or by an appropriately qualified and experienced senior Research Fellow. Research Fellows may only be appointed as Supervisor when their contract extends beyond the expected thesis submission date of the student. The Academic Staff Supervisor of an MD student will additionally have experience of research involving human participants and/or human tissue and appropriate academic scientific expertise to support Protocol development and delivery of the study. (*Regulation 6.1a*)

The Supervisor should have the appropriate skills and subject knowledge to support, encourage and monitor research students effectively.

A research student's supervision should normally be supplemented by at least one Associate Supervisor. (*Regulation 6.3*)

The role of any Associate Supervisor(s) will be clarified at an initial meeting with the student and documented in a Learning Agreement (see Section 6.2 of this Code).

No person may be the Supervisor for more than nine research students (six FTE) at any time without the agreement of the Associate Dean Research; this number should be proportionate for part-time staff. (*Regulation 6.1f*)

The Associate Dean Research will review the situation, taking account of the overall workload of the member of staff concerned and the extent to which Associate Supervisors have been appointed.

⁵ See Research Integrity: Code of Conduct, Appendix A

A Supervisor who has not previously supervised a doctoral candidate to successful completion will not normally supervise more than three research students. (*Regulation 6.1f*)

Supervisors who have not supervised at least four students to successful doctoral completion at the time of their appointment to Aston must attend the University's training session on supervision as provided by Staff & Graduate Development. Supervisors who have such supervisory experience will be inducted into Aston procedures and policies by appropriate School staff. The Associate Dean Research in each School must appoint an Associate Supervisor for a Supervisor who has not previously supervised a research student to successful completion.

A Supervisor who has not previously supervised a doctoral candidate to successful completion will be supported by an Associate Supervisor who is a member of the Academic Staff who has supervised and examined at least one successful doctoral candidate. (*Regulation 6.1d*)

The University expects that all Supervisors will take the initiative to update their knowledge and skills on a regular basis and access 'update' training provided by Staff and Graduate Development at least once every three years.

All research students must be given the name and contact details of at least one other member of academic staff from whom they may seek advice and support in the absence or unavailability of the main Supervisor, or in circumstances where a student finds the student/Supervisor relationship is not working well. (*Regulation 6.1g*)

The second member of academic staff named as student advisor may be from outside the specific area of the student's research topic. The same appointment would normally continue throughout a student's full period of study. (*Regulation 6.1h*)

In the event that a Supervisor leaves the University during a student's research programme, every effort will be made to appoint an alternative Supervisor and, where possible and appropriate, to retain the involvement of the original Supervisor as an Associate Supervisor.

The names and contact details of a student's Supervisor, Associate Supervisor(s) and Postgraduate Tutor are displayed on the student's MAP homepage.

6.1 Responsibilities of Supervisors

The responsibilities of Supervisors include:

- a introducing the research student to the research environment, its facilities and procedures, and to other research students and relevant staff;
- b providing satisfactory and accurate guidance and advice, and giving consideration to the appointment of additional Associate Supervisor(s) where this may be beneficial as the student's research progresses;
- c being responsible for monitoring the student's progress, mindful of the timing of the student's progression points and thesis submission date;

- d establishing and maintaining regular contact, at a frequency agreed with the student (normally at least every two weeks), and including structured interactions at least every 3 months to discuss and agree progress, and to report it formally (Regulation 8.1);
- e ensuring their reasonable accessibility to the student at other appropriate times when the student needs advice;
- f having input into the assessment of a student's development needs and regularly reviewing and amending those needs and advising students on their personal development planning;
- g providing timely, constructive and effective feedback on the student's work, including their overall progress;
- h ensuring that the student is made aware of lack of satisfactory progress on the research programme and the implications of this for the student;
- i ensuring that the student is aware of the need to conduct their research according to ethical principles, respecting any issues of confidentiality, and of the implications of research misconduct⁶, including plagiarism;
- j providing guidance on the maintenance of research records applicable to the nature of the research;
- k providing effective pastoral support and/or referring the student to other sources of such support, including careers guidance;
- l helping the student to interact with others working in the field of research, for example, by encouraging the student to attend relevant conferences, supporting them in seeking funding for such events; and, where appropriate, to submit conference papers and articles to refereed journals;
- m maintaining the necessary supervisory expertise, including the appropriate skills, to perform the role of Supervisor satisfactorily, supported by relevant continuing professional development opportunities

6.2 Responsibilities of research students

Students are responsible for the content, completion and submission for examination of their thesis within the periods of study as prescribed in Regulations for their particular degree.

Students are also responsible for:

- a taking responsibility for their own personal and professional development and attending induction programmes as advised by their Supervisor or School Research Office;
- b ensuring that they are familiar with and comply with University Regulations and School guidelines and procedures relating to their degree, relevant Codes of Practice and other University and School requirements, health and safety advice, the monitoring of progress, and terms of any sponsorship;
- c setting and keeping to timetables and deadlines, including planning and submitting work as and when required and generally maintaining satisfactory progress with the programme of research;

⁶ set out in detail in the University's Code of Practice for Dealing with Allegations of Research Misconduct in Appendix B

- d ensuring that in every year of enrolment they meet all of the University's requirements regarding administrative arrangements; for example, completing enrolment, re-enrolment and annual reports on progress;
- e discussing with their Supervisor the type of guidance and feedback they find most helpful, and agreeing a schedule of meetings for which they adequately prepare;
- f maintaining regular contact, normally at least every two weeks, with their Supervisor and initiating supervisory meetings where necessary;
- g in conjunction with their Supervisor and informed by the Vitae Researcher Development Statement⁷, identifying their training needs and attending training on research methods and other relevant topics, including personal and skills development opportunities;
- h maintaining research records in such a way that they can be accessed and understood by anyone with a legitimate need to see them;
- i deciding when to submit their thesis (after the minimum period of research and before the end of the maximum period of research specified in the Regulations), taking due account of the Supervisor's opinion;
- j ensuring that they understand the nature of their Supervisor's responsibilities (see section 6.1 above);
- k advising their supervisors of any illness, holidays or any other occasions when they will be absent from the University or from their study, or of any other circumstances likely to affect their work;
- l where possible, recognising when they need help and seeking it in a timely manner;
- m seeking advice from an International Advisor in The Hub if they have any queries about their student visa or immigration status (international students only).

Supervisors and students will complete individual Learning Agreements as an aide memoire to covering these points and as a document for future reference. A Training Needs Analysis will be completed at the same time as the Learning Agreement and will be reviewed at least annually. Template forms are provided in the Student Handbook.

7 Progress and Review Arrangements

Students and Supervisors are expected to be in regular contact, meeting, or interacting over a distance, normally at least every two weeks on average. At least every three months a student's progress should be formally reviewed by the Supervisor. Prior to the meeting, the student will be expected to provide the Supervisor with a detailed report of the methods used and the results obtained from their research. Both the student and the Supervisor should keep a copy of the recorded outcomes of the meetings, or other interaction if students are studying at some distance from the University. A template Record of Supervisory meeting form is provided in the Student Handbook.

At the end of each year of research a report must be submitted to the Associate Dean Research on the performance of each research student, including details of

⁷ The Vitae Researcher Development Statement (RDS) is provided as an Appendix to the Student Handbook. Detailed information about the RDS and the associated Researcher Development Framework (RDF) is available on the Vitae website (www.vitae.ac.uk/rdf).

the skills training undertaken by the student during the year and a review of forthcoming training needs, unless the student has been granted an exemption from skills training. (*Regulation 8.2a*)

For MPhil/PhD students, the annual report before the end of the first full-time year or second part-time year of research will contain a recommendation concerning the student's progression to either the MPhil or PhD degree programme, based on the student's Qualifying Report on the research work and a *viva voce* examination (see Regulations Section 8: Reports). A Guide to Requirements for the Qualifying Report is provided in the Student Handbook. Professional Doctorate students will have a similar progression point specified for their programme. Doctor of Medicine (MD) students enrol on the MD programme from the outset and submit a Qualifying Report to determine continued progression on the programme.

Before the end of the second year (fourth year for part-time students) PhD and professional doctorate students are required to complete a minimum of *either* an oral presentation of all or part of their research *or* write up all or part of their research as a paper (without the requirement to submit for publication). The Supervisor will consult with the student about which task the student is expected to complete and structured feedback will be provided. The student is expected to write a brief report on what they have gained from completing the task. Template feedback forms for each of the progression tasks are included in the Student Handbook. All Schools should have clear and transparent procedures for the monitoring of student performance and students should be notified in writing by the School of their review timetable and of the outcomes of the key stages above.

The Regulations allow for leave of absence in appropriate circumstances (eg illness) and for a 12-month extension of time beyond the normal duration of the research programme (subject to approval by the School Research Committee). Detailed information about the processes to be followed is contained in Student Handbooks.

8 Development of Research and Other Skills

The University considers that skills training is key to the development of independent, employable, researchers, and students are therefore expected to complete a minimum number of skills training hours during their research programme, as defined in Regulations and as agreed with their Supervisor during completion and review of the Training Needs Analysis. A list of the training undertaken is sent to the Examiners before the *viva voce* examination.

For professional doctorate programmes, the taught element of each programme satisfies the requirement for skills hours but students are nevertheless encouraged to take advantage of the additional opportunities available for personal development.

The University will provide training in research and generic skills appropriate, wherever possible, to a student's individual needs and as defined in the Training Needs Analysis initiated at the beginning of the first year as part of the Learning Agreement and reviewed at least annually thereafter. Training will be provided by the Schools, and by the Graduate Development Team, co-ordinated by Staff and Graduate Development. Provision of skills training will be kept under review by

Schools as part of their annual review of research degree programmes, and by the Graduate School Management Committee.

Guidance, support and training will be provided to, and will be expected to be undertaken by, students who have opportunities for teaching, demonstrating and/or assessing. Details of how to access teaching/demonstrating opportunities in each School are provided in the Student Handbook.

9 Evaluation Mechanisms

As part of the annual programme review process, Schools will consider and where necessary respond to feedback from research students, graduates, examiners, employers, sponsors and other internal and external stakeholders. School Annual Programme Review Reports are subsequently considered by the Graduate School Management Committee.

Students will be given the opportunity to provide confidential individual feedback as well as the opportunity to take part in School and University committee meetings. Students will be informed of actions taken in response to their feedback.

Feedback from research students will be sought every other year through the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) administered by the Higher Education Academy. Students will be provided with feedback on the PRES results.

The Head of the Graduate School will meet regularly with the Aston Postgraduate Research Society (APRS) providing the opportunity for discussion with research students from each School.

10 Assessment

The assessment of students is on the basis of an appropriate body of work, as specified in the Regulations for that award, and a *viva voce* examination conducted according to the guidance set out in Appendix C, Conduct of the *viva voce*. The requirements for the award are stated in Regulations and reference the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) doctoral qualification and master's degree descriptors.

Two Examiners are appointed to consider the candidate and one Examiner must be external to the University. In the case of staff candidates, both Examiners must be external to the University.

The Internal Examiner may not be the student's Supervisor, the Advisor to the Supervisor (if appointed), an Associate Supervisor, or be otherwise involved in the supervision of the student (eg a member of a supervisory team). (*Regulation 16.1d*)

The Examiners' role is critical in the assessment of research degrees, not only for the individual candidate but also for assuring the quality of the University's academic standards, and the Regulations specify detailed criteria for their

appointment. All Examiners must be appropriately experienced in research as judged by the Associate Dean Research and the Senate.

An External Examiner must have previous experience of successful PhD supervision and the examination team must have substantial experience (ie normally three or more previous examinations) of examining doctoral research degree students. (*Regulation 16.1g*)

Recommendations for the appointment of Examiners must be submitted using the form designed for this purpose.

Neither the Internal nor the External Examiner should have had substantial co-authoring or collaborative involvement in the student's work, and neither of the Examiners' own work should be the focus of the student's thesis/portfolio. (*Regulation 16.1h*)

Examiners will be requested to declare any personal conflict of interest which might preclude their appointment. (*Regulation 16.1i*)

All Examiners' appointments must be approved by the Senate or by the Vice-Chancellor or nominee on behalf of the Senate. (*Regulation 16*)

Examiners must submit individual independent written reports on the student's thesis before the *viva voce* and a joint written report after the *viva voce*.

For all *viva voce* an

independent, non-examining Chair normally should be appointed from within the relevant School except for staff candidates when the Chair should be from a different School. The Chair should not have had a substantial involvement in the candidate's work or have been involved in the appointment of the Examiners, but should have experience of research degree assessment. (*Regulation 17b*)

Appendix C provides further guidance on the Conduct of the *viva voce* examination on a research student's thesis/portfolio.

The University takes a serious view of misconduct in research at any stage in the research degree programme and cases of alleged misconduct, which includes plagiarism and collusion, are dealt with under the [University's Regulations on Student Discipline](#).

11 Complaints and Appeals

The University has approved procedures for dealing with complaints and appeals which may be found on the [Registry website](#) and which will be referenced in the Student Handbook. The procedures will also be accessible from a student's MAP homepage. Research students who are recommended for withdrawal from the programme because of, for example, lack of satisfactory progress, including as a result of the examination of the Qualifying Report, will be provided with the opportunity to make representations to the Associate Dean Research and the Director of Research Degree Programmes, or equivalent (Regulation 11). If the

outcome of the meeting is unsatisfactory to the student, they may appeal under the provisions of the University's Student Complaints or Academic Appeals Procedures.

Research students who are dissatisfied with their conditions of work or the quality of their supervision should wherever possible discuss the difficulties with their Supervisor. In doing so, it may be appropriate to refer to [this] University Code of Practice for Research Degrees. (*Regulation 28a*)

If a research student prefers not to discuss their concerns with the Supervisor, the student should approach the Associate Dean Research or their nominee or, where the Associate Dean Research is the Supervisor, the Executive Dean. (*Regulation 28b*)

Ultimately, a complaint may be referred under the procedures detailed in the Student Complaints Procedure.

The student may be accompanied or represented at investigative, representation or appeal meetings and will be made aware of the availability of independent advice from the Students' Union Advice and Representation Centre.

In cases where the University's internal complaints or appeals procedures have been exhausted, the student will be provided with the details of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA). The OIA is an independent scheme for the review of student complaints. The OIA cannot interfere with the operation of a University's academic judgement which is stated as being "a judgment that is made about a matter where only the opinion of an academic expert will suffice"⁸.

Graduate School Management Committee will receive the University's annual report on student appeals in order to review processes and guidance in place against any recommendations in the report.

Last updated August 2014/RSP/GraduateSchool/AJB

References and Acknowledgements

- QAA (2012) UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Chapter B11 Research Degrees
- Cranfield University, Code of Practice on Postgraduate Training and Research
- QAA (2004) Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes.
- HEFCE (2003) Improving standards in postgraduate research degree programmes, consultation paper May 2003/23, and consultation responses.
- Aston University, Learning Agreement
- Vitae Researcher Development Statement (RDS) - www.vitae.ac.uk/rdf
- Aston University General Regulations for Degrees by Research and Thesis 2014/5

⁸Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education, Glossary:
<http://www.oiahe.org.uk/glossary.aspx>

Appendix A: RESEARCH INTEGRITY: CODE OF CONDUCT ***1. Guiding principles and policy**

The University is committed to the highest standards of research integrity and compliance with the Universities UK concordat to support research integrity (1). The concordat provides a comprehensive national framework for good research conduct and its governance. By acting in accordance with the principles and commitments in the concordat, the research community can demonstrate that they:

- Underpin all of their work with common values of rigour and integrity
- Conform to all ethical, legal and professional obligations incumbent on their work
- Nurture a research environment that supports research of the highest standards of rigour and integrity
- Use transparent, robust and fair processes to handle allegations of misconduct
- Continue to monitor, and where necessary improve, the suitability and appropriateness of the mechanisms in place to provide assurances over the integrity of research

The concordat applies to all fields of research and recognises the different responsibilities of: researchers; the University as their employer; and other bodies involved in the research process in each of its commitments.

Concordat Commitments:

1. We are committed to maintaining the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research.
2. We are committed to ensuring that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards.
3. We are committed to supporting a research environment that is underpinned by a culture of integrity and based on good governance, best practice and support for the development of researchers.
4. We are committed to using transparent, robust and fair processes to deal with allegations of misconduct should they arise.
5. We are committed to working together to strengthen the integrity of research and reviewing progress regularly and openly.

This code of conduct prescribes standards of work performance and conduct expected by all persons engaged in research at the University.

2. Scope and responsibilities

The Senate of the University, through its Research Committee, has general responsibility to ensure compliance with the Code across the University. Executive Deans have a responsibility to ensure compliance with the Code in their Schools. All staff, students and visiting researchers must familiarise themselves with the Code and ensure that its

* title changed from Research Code of Conduct, June 2014

provisions are observed. The University will ensure all newly appointed research administrators, researchers and research students are made amply aware of the Code, and Supervisors of students and visiting researchers involved in research will seek to ensure that they comply with the Code.

3. Maintaining the highest standards of rigour and integrity

Researchers should conduct their research in accordance with the core elements of research integrity:

Honesty, in all aspects of research including:

- Presentation of research goals, intentions and findings
- Reporting on research methods and procedures
- Gathering data
- Acknowledging the work of other researchers
- Conveying valid interpretations and making justifiable claims based on research findings

Rigour, in line with prevailing disciplinary norms and standards in:

- Performing research and using appropriate methods
- Adhering to an agreed protocol
- Drawing interpretations from the research
- Communicating the results

Transparency and open communication, in:

- Declaring conflicts of interest
- Reporting of research data collection methods
- Analysis and interpretation of data, including sharing negative results as appropriate
- Presenting work to other researchers and the general public

Care and respect, for:

- All participants and subjects of research, including humans, animals, the environment and cultural objects
- Research stewardship and scholarship for future generations
- Environment impacts of research, including efficiency, waste and sustainability

These core elements apply to all aspects of the research process, including: the preparation and submission of grant and project proposals; data collection and analysis; publication and dissemination of findings; and peer review of proposals and publication.

The primary responsibility for maintaining the highest standards of rigour and integrity lies with researchers who must ensure that they understand the expected standards and act according to them in all aspects of their research work, including peer review.

The University supports researchers in maintaining the highest standards of research integrity by maintaining a research environment that develops good research practice.

4. Ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards

Research is governed by a range of ethical, legal and professional frameworks obligations and standards. These frameworks change over time, and so researchers therefore have a responsibility to have an up-to-date knowledge of those that apply to their work both in the UK and any countries outside the UK where research is being conducted.

Researchers should comply with all relevant requirements and associated University policies:

4.1 Registration of research and ethical review

- All research should be registered via the University on-line research governance registration system⁹, and where appropriate be considered and given a favorable opinion by an ethics committee

4.2 Research involving human participants

- Researchers should ensure the consent of participants in research, along with the confidentiality of any personal information, and that the research fulfils any legal requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998
- Research involving human participants and/or their tissues and/or data that are being recruited in association with the NHS must be submitted for Research Governance review by the University and if required reviewed and given a favorable opinion by an appropriate National Research Ethics Service Ethics Committee¹⁰
- All research involving the NHS (research with patients and/or tissues and/or data and/or staff) must have NHS Permissions at each site involved in the research and be conducted in accordance with the Department of Health Research Governance Framework (2)
- Research involving clinical procedures must be undertaken in accordance with the Good Clinical Practice Standards (3)
- All research with human tissue must be carried out in accordance with the Aston University Quality Manual for the Collection, Storage, Use and Disposal of Human Tissue¹¹

⁹ This system will be introduced during the 2014/2015 academic year, in the interim please seek advice on current School procedures

¹⁰ For advice on these procedures please contact the Aston Health Research and Innovation Cluster – ahric.governance@aston.ac.uk

¹¹ Copies of the Quality Manual can be obtained from the Aston Health Research and Innovation Cluster – ahric.governance@aston.ac.uk

- Additional approval from regulatory bodies should also be sought where necessary, such as the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency

4.3 Research involving animals

- During the design of research that will involve animals, researchers must consider the opportunity for reduction, replacement and refinement of animal involvement
- All research involving animals must have approval of the Bioethics Research Committee
- Appropriate Home Office licenses (institution, investigator and project) must be in place for all studies using animals

4.4 Legal requirements

- All research should comply with any UK and as appropriate overseas legal requirements
- Research should be conducted in accordance with relevant University policies, such as the University Health and Safety Policy

4.5 Professional Standards

- Researchers must comply with any professional codes of conduct, ethical frameworks and guidelines of professional bodies with which they are registered
- Researchers must adhere to specific requirements of research funders as part of the conditions of a grant and broader HEFCE requirements
- Researchers must ensure that academic and non-academic impact of their research is maximised

4.6 Data Management

- There should be clarity at the outset of a research project of the ownership and confidentiality of data and samples created in the course of the research, and the results of the research; where necessary, collaborative agreements should be in place to achieve this
- Research data (methods and results) should be documented in a manner that would facilitate replication by independent researchers and audit

- When submitting a thesis, raw data should not be included in the submission but must be made available, on request, to Supervisors and, subject to ethical and confidentiality considerations, to Examiners
- Research data should be maintained and archived according to local and University policies

4.7 Supervision

- It is the responsibility of Executive Deans (or their nominee, usually the Associate Dean Research) to ensure that appropriate direction of research and supervision is provided, and that training in supervisory skills is provided and undertaken
- Supervision must be in accordance with the University's Code of Practice for Research Degrees and any requirements which may be prescribed from time to time by Senate through its Learning and Teaching or Research Committee

4.8 Publication

- Anyone listed as an author on a publication should accept responsibility for ensuring that he/she is familiar with the contents of the publication and can identify his/her contribution to it
- Anyone who has participated in a substantial way in research (conceiving, executing or interpreting) should be given the opportunity to be included as an author of a publication derived from that research. Appropriate reference to, and acknowledgement of, contributions from significant participants in the research should always be included in publications

4.9 Conflicts of interest

- Any personal conflicts of research interest – potential or actual – should be disclosed to the Executive Dean. Such conflicts of interest include close family affiliation or financial involvement with organisations funding research being undertaken by the researcher

4.10 Peer Review

- All information provided to staff and students as part of peer review processes must be treated as strictly confidential and used for the purpose of the review only. Reviewers must not take advantage of any information provided as part of the review process
- Reviewers should keep all documentation secure during the review process and destroy it once the review process has been completed

4.11 Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Researchers should pro-actively engage in CPD associated with the changing, ethical, legal and professional obligations associated with undertaking research

5. Research Misconduct

Research misconduct can take many forms, including:

- Fabrication
- Falsification
- Plagiarism
- Failure to meet ethical legal and professional obligations
- Improper dealing with allegations of misconduct, including covering up misconduct and reprisals against whistle blowers

The University has a separate code of practice covering allegations of research misconduct to which researchers must adhere. Within the University, any suspected misconduct should be reported confidentially to the Director of Governance.

When investigating allegations of research misconduct the University will ensure:

- Allegations are investigated in a robust and fair way
- There is no detriment to whistle blowers making allegations of misconduct in good faith
- Investigations of alleged misconduct are reported as appropriate to funders; professional and/or statutory bodies; and research collaborators
- That appropriate steps are taken to remedy any situations arising from misconduct

6. Research Integrity Concordat Compliance

The University will produce an annual statement on compliance to Council which includes:

- A summary of actions and activities undertaken to support and strengthen research integrity
- Assurance that the processes for dealing with allegations of misconduct are transparent, robust and fair, and that they are appropriate for the University
- A high-level statement on any formal investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken

The statement will be made publically available.

References

1. Universities UK concordat to support research integrity
<http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Documents/2012/TheConcordatToSupportResearchIntegrity.pdf>

2. Research governance framework for health and social care
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/research-governance-framework-for-health-and-social-care-second-edition>
3. Good Clinical Practice Standards
Good clinical practice guide, Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, September 2012

Approved by the University Senate September 2014

Appendix B: CODE OF PRACTICE FOR DEALING WITH ALLEGATIONS OF RESEARCH MISCONDUCT

Guiding Principles and Policy

Aston is committed to maintaining high standards and integrity in research conducted by its staff, visitors and students.

The University expects staff to take responsibility for carrying out their research in a professional and integral manner and for reporting any concerns they have around issues of misconduct.

The University will act swiftly to deal with allegations of misconduct in research, and do this in a thorough and fair manner, in accordance with the University's Staff Investigation Protocol or the Regulations on Student Discipline, as appropriate.

Definition

Misconduct in research is defined, in accordance with the UKRIO definition, as including, but not limited to:

- a) Fabrication;
- b) Falsification;
- c) Misrepresentation of data and/or interests and/or involvement;
- d) Plagiarism; and
- e) Failures to follow accepted procedures or to exercise due care in carrying out responsibilities for:
 - i) avoiding unreasonable risk or harm to:
 - humans;
 - animals used in research; and
 - the environment; and
 - ii) the proper handling of privileged or private information on individuals collected during the research.

Scope

This Code applies to all staff whose role involves carrying out research or supporting research, visitors to the University, and Students. In cases of staff secondments, honorary appointments or collaborative working on research projects, the employing organisation will deal with allegations of research misconduct and keep the other organisation informed.

Policy Framework and Process

The University will use the policies and procedures outlined below to guide any action taken:

The University's overarching approach to maintaining research integrity and standards in research is governed by its Ethics Framework <http://www.aston.ac.uk/about/university-governance/ethics-framework/>

Our Code of Conduct for Research Integrity sets out the University's expectations for the conduct of research at the University.

All staff are expected to report any concerns they may have around issues of research misconduct. The University's **Speak up policy** describes how they can do this and the rights of those involved. <http://www.aston.ac.uk/about/university-governance/university-regulation/speak-up-policy/>

Likewise Managers have a duty to act upon allegations of misconduct that are reported to them via the Speak up policy or otherwise, and the University's **Staff Investigation protocol** outlines how claims will be investigated.

The procedures governing the discipline of Academic Staff of the University, are set out in the University's Statutes and Ordinances Section XXV, part III (<http://www.aston.ac.uk/about/university-governance/charter-statutes-and-ordinances/>).

For other research workers and support staff, the disciplinary procedures for support staff will apply (<http://www.aston.ac.uk/staff/hr/policy-procedures/other/alcdisc/alcdisc-for-support/>).

Allegations of research misconduct against students are covered by the Regulations on Student Discipline, which includes the process of investigation of allegations, <http://www.aston.ac.uk/registry/for-staff/a-to-z-of-registry-services/discipline-of-students/> and the General Regulations for Degrees by Research and Thesis <http://www.aston.ac.uk/registry/for-staff/a-to-z-of-registry-services/researchregulationsandprocedures/>

The Vice-Chancellor will determine the appropriate stage at which to inform relevant sponsors of a particular research project of allegations of fraud and will advise sponsors of the outcome of any formal investigation.

Approved by the University Senate August 2014

Appendix C: Conduct of the *viva voce* examination on a research student's thesis/portfolio

The following paragraphs present guidance for the arrangements for and conduct of the *viva voce*; references to Regulations are to the General Regulations for Degrees by Research and Thesis.

1. The Chair of the *Viva Voce*

An independent, non-examining Chair should be appointed for all *viva voce*. The Chair should be selected by the School's Associate Dean Research from a pool of suitably qualified Academic Staff who have experience of research degree assessment and are familiar with the regulatory requirements.

The Chair should be independent in that he or she

should not have had a substantial direct involvement in the candidate's work or have been involved in the appointment of the Examiners (*Regulation 17b*)

The Chair must be impartial and cannot therefore be a member of the student's supervisory team or the Internal Examiner, and must be from a different research area. The Chair must not be nominated by the Supervisor or the Internal Examiner. In the case of a staff candidate, the Chair should be from a different School (*Regulation 17b*).

2. The Role of the Independent Chair

The role of the Independent Chair is to:

- i) ensure the *viva voce* examination is conducted in an open, professional, and non-intimidating manner by all parties involved;
- ii) be prepared to intervene in the process if the above requirements are not complied with;
- iii) ensure that only those parties who should be actively involved in the *viva voce* process are participating and that other attending parties (such as a Supervisor) do not take an active role and leave the meeting at the appropriate time, ie with the student;
- iv) ensure that the candidate has an opportunity to defend the thesis;
- v) suggest appropriate breaks in particularly long examinations and be mindful of the impact of a long examination on those attending;
- vi) provide an opinion on points of order or University Regulations if requested to do so by the Examiners or the student and in circumstances where it is necessary to do so in order to ensure that appropriate procedures are not breached;
- vii) ensure that the outcome is clearly communicated and is understood by the student;
- viii) sign at the end of the *viva voce* examination to confirm that the examination was conducted fairly, professionally, and without bias.

It is not the role of the Independent Chair to:

- i) receive a copy of the thesis to be examined;

The independent non-examining Chair must not be sent a copy of the thesis.
(Regulation 18a)

- ii) be involved in the examination of the student;
- iii) take part in the discussions as to outcome of the assessment.

3. The Role of the Examiners

Prior to the *viva voce* examination (on receipt of the thesis) the Examiners will satisfy themselves that they have the relevant expertise to examine the thesis and will inform the School Research Office as soon as possible if this is not the case;

The role of the Examiners is to:

- i) determine whether the candidate's work has met the requirements for the award being examined;
- ii) be confident, via the *viva voce* process, that the thesis is the candidate's own work and that the candidate is able to defend it.

The External Examiner is also responsible for assuring that the University's processes for assessment, examination and the determination of awards are robust and equitable compared with those of other universities.

4. Arrangements for the *Viva Voce*

The *viva voce* examination shall normally be held at least three weeks and no more than three months after the submission of the thesis/portfolio. (Regulation 15.3)

The Supervisor should notify the Examiners, the student, and the Independent Chair, in writing, giving at least two weeks' notice, of the date, time, place and names of those attending the *viva voce* examination.

The *viva voce* examination will normally take place on the University campus. It should be held in a suitable room which ensures privacy and lack of distraction or interruption from others, with an appropriate amount of time being set aside for the meeting. There should be a separate waiting area for the candidate.

It is the responsibility of the research student to advise the Examiners, in writing, before the final *viva voce* examination, of any factors which may affect their performance. (Regulation 18d)

Reasonable adjustments may be made where required, in accordance with guidance received from the University's Disability Team.

5. Purpose/Aim of the *Viva Voce*

- i) Provides the student with an opportunity to defend their thesis;
- ii) assists the Examiners in their decision as to whether or not the student has met the requirements for the degree;
- iii) examines the general field within which the subject of the thesis lies;

- iv) allows detailed discussion of the thesis;
- v) explores the ideas and theories proposed in the thesis;
- vi) clarifies points of ambiguity;
- vii) satisfies the Examiners that the thesis is the student's own work and, where applicable, the extent of any collaboration.

6. Conduct of the *Viva Voce*

- i) if any of those who should be attending are unable to be present, then the *viva voce* must normally be re-arranged;
- ii) time should be made available on the day of, and before the *viva voce*, for the Examiners to meet and discuss their preliminary reports and to discuss the approach to the examination, for example the main areas to be explored with the candidate and the order in which they will be raised;
- iii) the Chair should introduce those present, putting them at their ease, explaining the form the *viva voce* will take and what happens afterwards. The Chair will only intervene if there is a danger of misunderstanding (including of regulatory matters), unfairness, bias or unprofessional behaviour, but should not hesitate to do so if this is the case;
- iv) each Examiner should contribute, but with the External Examiner taking the lead;
- v) there are no rules governing the length of the *viva voce*. It is at the Examiners' discretion to make the *viva voce* as long or as short as they think necessary but around two hours is typical and it should not normally be expected to exceed four hours. Short breaks are permitted if necessary/requested;
- vi) there may be intense questioning, but it should be non-aggressive. Wherever possible, Examiners should ask questions in a constructive way. If, in the opinion of the Chair, the questioning becomes aggressive, he or she should intervene;
- vii) the Supervisor may be invited by the Examiners or the Independent Chair to participate in discussions but will be required to leave before any decision is taken, and should not sign any of the Examiners' reports or recommendations (*Regulation 17b*);
- viii) no-one, at any time, should indicate the likely outcome.

7. After the *Viva Voce*

- i) The student and Supervisor (if present) should be asked to withdraw. The Supervisor must not be involved in any of the deliberations or decision-making;
- ii) the Examiners should deliberate in private;
- iii) the Examiners may invite the student and Supervisor to hear the recommendation (noting that this is provisional only). Care should be taken to convey the recommendation clearly and in accordance with the Regulations (see section 8 below: 'Outcomes of the Examination');
- iv) the Examiners' Reports on the *viva voce* examination and the Joint Recommendation should be completed and submitted to the appropriate School Research Office, together with an outline of any revisions or required amendments, ideally immediately after the conclusion of the *viva voce*;
- v) the Independent Chair should sign the Examiners' Joint Recommendation on the *viva voce* examination to indicate whether or not the examination was conducted fairly, professionally and without bias;

- vi) all Examiners' recommendations must be submitted to the Senate or the Vice-Chancellor or nominee on behalf of the Senate, via the Registry or the appropriate School Office (*Regulations 19a and 23*);
- vii) External Examiners are invited to complete a separate report to provide feedback on the processes and arrangements for the examination.

8. Outcomes of the Examination

8.1 Satisfactory

A satisfactory recommendation will only be made in cases where the Examiners are satisfied that the quality of the thesis and the defence of it at the *viva voce* examination have met the requirements for the degree (General Regulations for Degrees by Research and Thesis, Regulation 1.2).

(*Regulations*)

19.1 Satisfactory

- a If the Examiners are satisfied with the thesis/portfolio and with the student's performance at the *viva voce* examination (or written examination, if Regulation 18(e) is used), they must jointly recommend the award of the degree.
- b The Examiners may recommend the award of MSc/MA (by Research) with distinction if they are satisfied that the thesis is of exceptional quality.
- c The Examiners may not recommend the award of MD/PhD/professional doctorate to a student unless the student submitted for that award.

19.2 Satisfactory subject to Minor Revisions

If the Examiners are satisfied with the thesis/portfolio and with the student's performance at the *viva voce* examination but require minor revisions to be made to the thesis before it is bound, they must make one of the following joint recommendations and inform the student accordingly:

- a Doctoral Submission
 - i That the degree of MD/PhD/professional doctorate be awarded on completion of minor revisions within three months (see Regulation 20b);
 - ii That the degree of MD/PhD/professional doctorate, be awarded on completion of minor revisions within six months (see Regulation 20b);
- b MPhil Submission
 - i That the degree of MPhil be awarded on completion of minor revisions within three months (see Regulation 20b);
 - ii That the degree of MPhil be awarded on completion of minor revisions within six months (see Regulation 20b);
- c MSc/MA (by Research) Submission
 - i That the degree of MSc/MA (by Research) be awarded on completion of minor revisions, with 'distinction';
 - ii That the degree of MSc/MA (by Research) be awarded on completion of minor revisions, without 'distinction'.

19.3 Unsatisfactory

If the Examiners are not satisfied with the thesis/portfolio (irrespective of the student's performance at the *viva voce* examination), they must make one of the following joint recommendations and inform the student accordingly:

- a Doctoral Submission
 - i that the student be permitted to submit a revised thesis/portfolio for re-examination within one year for the degree of MD/PhD/professional doctorate (see Regulation 21a);
 - ii that the degree of MPhil be awarded (PhD submission only);
 - iii that the degree of MPhil be awarded (PhD submission only) on completion of minor revisions within three or six months (see Regulation 20b);
 - iv that the student be permitted to submit a revised thesis/portfolio within one year for re-examination for the degree of MPhil (PhD submission only);
 - v that no degree be awarded;
 - vi that the unsuccessful professional doctorate thesis or portfolio be recommended to the relevant Board of Examiners as equivalent to the Master's dissertation (in cases where there is a linked Masters only).
- b MPhil Submission
 - i that the student be permitted to submit a revised thesis for re-examination within one year for the degree of MPhil (see Regulation 21a);
 - ii that no degree be awarded.
- c MSc/MA (by Research) Submission
 - i that the student be permitted to submit a revised thesis for re-examination for the degree of MSc/MA (by Research) within six months of the date of the *viva voce*. In such cases no distinction may be awarded;
 - ii that no degree be awarded.

19.4 No Agreed Recommendation

If the Examiners are unable to agree upon one of the joint recommendations in Regulation 19.1, 19.2 or 19.3 above, they must submit individual reports to the Senate or the Vice-Chancellor or nominee on behalf of the Senate through the Registry or the appropriate School Office, making clear the reasons for their disagreement (see Regulation 16.3).

16.3 Referee Examiner

If the Examiners are unable to agree upon a recommendation an External Referee Examiner will be appointed by the Senate, or by the Vice-Chancellor or nominee on behalf of the Senate, to make an independent report upon the thesis/portfolio (see Regulations 19.4 and 23.4).

8.3 Minor Revisions within three or six months

20 COMPLETION OF MINOR REVISIONS

- a The Examiners shall provide the student with details of the minor revisions required to a thesis/portfolio within two weeks of the date of the *viva voce* examination.
- b Minor revisions to a thesis/portfolio must be completed by the student in accordance with the wishes of the Examiners within an agreed timescale of three or six months from the date of the *viva voce* examination. For minor revisions to an MSc/MA (by Research) thesis a shorter timescale may be agreed by the Examiners, with the maximum being three months.

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|---|---|
| c | The Examiners must confirm that the minor revisions have been completed to their satisfaction before their recommendation is forwarded to the Senate or the Vice-Chancellor or nominee on behalf of the Senate. |
| d | The External Examiner may authorise the Internal Examiner to approve the student's completion of minor revisions. If there are two External Examiners (in the case of a staff candidate) one may authorise the other to approve the student's completion of minor errors. |
| e | The Supervisor will provide guidance on the correction of minor revisions. |

The period of time given for minor revisions should reflect the amount of work involved, rather than the individual circumstances of the student. It should not be influenced by whether the candidate was previously full- or part-time.

Minor revisions are not expected to require a major re-working of, or major additions to, the thesis. They will vary from thesis to thesis but may include: typographical errors; inclusion of a small amount of additional material; minor revisions to some sections of the text; further statistical analysis.

8.4 Submission of a revised thesis for re-examination (Resubmission)

In circumstances where the Examiners believe that the standard for the award may be reached by a significant reworking of the thesis/portfolio, for example additional experimental work or data analysis, they may decide to allow the candidate to submit a revised thesis for re-examination.

21	RESUBMISSION OF A REVISED THESIS/PORTFOLIO FOR RE-EXAMINATION
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- | | |
|---|---|
| a | Major or extensive defects in the content or presentation of the research entailing resubmission and re-examination of the MPhil or doctoral thesis/portfolio must be rectified within one year of the date of the <i>viva voce</i> examination. This time limit is applicable to both full-time and part-time research students. |
| b | Major or extensive defects in the content or presentation of the research entailing resubmission and re-examination of the MSc/MA (by Research) thesis should be rectified within six months of the date of the <i>viva voce</i> examination. |
| c | The Examiners must provide the student with details of the required amendments, in writing, when making their recommendation to the Senate or the Vice-Chancellor or nominee on behalf of the Senate. This should normally be within two weeks of the date of the <i>viva voce</i> examination. |
| d | Students should submit a commentary with their revised thesis/portfolio indicating how the amendments required by the Examiners have been addressed. |
| e | The student's Supervisor will provide appropriate and reasonable guidance on the revision of the thesis. |

22	RE-EXAMINATION OF A REVISED THESIS/PORTFOLIO
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The examination procedure must be as specified in Regulations 17 and 18, except where modified by the following provisions:

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|---|---|
| a | the resubmitted thesis/portfolio must be examined by the previously appointed Examiners unless the Senate or the Vice-Chancellor or nominee |
|---|---|

	on behalf of the Senate is satisfied that there is a sound case for the replacement of any Examiner(s). An Internal Examiner who has since left the University and is no longer a member of the Academic Staff may continue in the role for the student concerned,
b	the appointment of any replacement Examiner(s) must be in accordance with Regulation 16,
c	the Examiners may require the student to attend a <i>viva voce</i> examination on the resubmitted thesis/portfolio.

23 EXAMINERS' RECOMMENDATIONS ON A RESUBMITTED THESIS/PORTFOLIO

All Examiners' recommendations must be submitted to the Senate or the Vice-Chancellor or the nominee on behalf of the Senate, via the Registry or the appropriate School Office.

The Examiners should normally determine their recommendation within three months of the student resubmitting their thesis/portfolio.

23.1 Satisfactory

- | | |
|---|---|
| a | If the Examiners are satisfied with the revised thesis/portfolio (and with the student's performance at the <i>viva voce</i> examination, if required, or written examination if Regulation 18e is used), they shall jointly recommend the award of the degree, |
| b | The Examiners may not recommend the award of PhD to a student submitting a revised thesis/portfolio for the degree of MPhil, |
| c | The Examiners may not recommend an award 'with distinction' to a student submitting a revised thesis/portfolio for the degree of MSc (by Research). |

23.2 Satisfactory subject to Minor Revisions

If the Examiners are satisfied with the thesis/portfolio and, where applicable, with the student's performance at the *viva voce* examination but require minor revisions to be made to the thesis before it is bound, they must make one of the following joint recommendations and inform the student accordingly:

- | | | | | | |
|----|--|---|--|----|--|
| a | Resubmission for Doctorate | | | | |
| | <table border="1"> <tr> <td>i</td> <td>That the degree of MD/PhD/professional doctorate be awarded on completion of minor revisions within three months (see Regulation 20b);</td> </tr> <tr> <td>ii</td> <td>That the degree of MD/PhD/professional doctorate be awarded on completion of minor revisions within six months (see Regulation 20b);</td> </tr> </table> | i | That the degree of MD/PhD/professional doctorate be awarded on completion of minor revisions within three months (see Regulation 20b); | ii | That the degree of MD/PhD/professional doctorate be awarded on completion of minor revisions within six months (see Regulation 20b); |
| i | That the degree of MD/PhD/professional doctorate be awarded on completion of minor revisions within three months (see Regulation 20b); | | | | |
| ii | That the degree of MD/PhD/professional doctorate be awarded on completion of minor revisions within six months (see Regulation 20b); | | | | |
| b | Resubmission for MPhil | | | | |
| | <table border="1"> <tr> <td>i</td> <td>That the degree of MPhil be awarded on completion of minor revisions within three months (see Regulation 20b);</td> </tr> <tr> <td>ii</td> <td>That the degree of MPhil be awarded on completion of minor revisions within six months (see Regulation 20b);</td> </tr> </table> | i | That the degree of MPhil be awarded on completion of minor revisions within three months (see Regulation 20b); | ii | That the degree of MPhil be awarded on completion of minor revisions within six months (see Regulation 20b); |
| i | That the degree of MPhil be awarded on completion of minor revisions within three months (see Regulation 20b); | | | | |
| ii | That the degree of MPhil be awarded on completion of minor revisions within six months (see Regulation 20b); | | | | |
| c | Resubmission for MSc/MA (by Research) | | | | |

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| <p>i That the degree of MSc/MA (by Research) be awarded on completion of minor revisions within a maximum timescale of three months. The award may not be made 'with distinction'.</p> |
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23.3 Unsatisfactory

If the Examiners are not satisfied with the thesis/portfolio (irrespective of the student's performance at the *viva voce* examination, if required), they shall make one of the following recommendations and inform the student accordingly:

a Resubmission for doctorate

- | |
|--|
| <p>i that the degree of MPhil be awarded (PhD only),
 ii that the degree of MPhil be awarded (PhD only) on completion of minor revisions within three or six months (see Regulation 20b),
 iii that the unsuccessful professional doctorate thesis or portfolio be recommended to the relevant Board of Examiners as equivalent to the Master's dissertation (in cases where there is a linked Masters only),
 iv that no degree be awarded.</p> |
|--|

b Resubmission for MPhil

- | |
|-------------------------------------|
| <p>i that no degree be awarded.</p> |
|-------------------------------------|

c Resubmission for MSc/MA (by Research)

- | |
|-------------------------------------|
| <p>i that no degree be awarded.</p> |
|-------------------------------------|

23.4 No Agreed Recommendation

If the Examiners are unable to agree upon one of the joint recommendations in Regulation 23.1, 23.2 or 23.3 above, they must submit individual reports to the Senate, or the Vice-Chancellor or nominee on behalf of the Senate, through the Registry or the appropriate School Office, making clear the reasons for their disagreement (see Regulation 16.3).

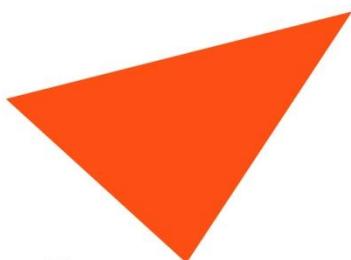
16.3 Referee Examiner

If the Examiners are unable to agree upon a recommendation an External Referee Examiner will be appointed by the Senate, or by the Vice-Chancellor or nominee on behalf of the Senate, to make an independent report upon the thesis/portfolio (see Regulations 19.4 and 23.4).

Acknowledgements

- University of Reading (2014) *Examining PhDs and other research programme theses; Good Practice Guide*
- University of Bristol *Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes 2013/14*

Appendix D: General Regulations for Degrees by Research and Thesis



Aston University

GENERAL REGULATIONS FOR DEGREES BY RESEARCH AND THESIS

Applicable to students in all Stages/years of programmes

These General Regulations, approved by the University Senate, set out the requirements for research awards assessed by thesis: MSc/MA (by Research); Master of Philosophy (MPhil); Doctor of Philosophy (PhD); Doctor of Medicine (MD) and professional doctorates.

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Regulations for the degrees of Doctor of Science, Doctor of Letters, PhD by Previously Published Work, and for staff candidates for MPhil/PhD/MD degrees are published separately on the Registry web-site. There are also separate General Regulations for the Presentation of Theses.

1 GENERAL**1.1 Admission to the Degree**

Students of the University may be admitted by the Senate to the degrees of MSc or MA (by Research), Master of Philosophy (MPhil), Doctor of Medicine (MD), Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) or a professional doctorate (e.g. Doctor of Business Administration (DBA), Doctor of Optometry (DOptom)) on complying with the requirements of these Regulations, with the University's Code of Practice for Research Degrees, and with such Ordinances and other Regulations as are relevant.

1.2 Nature of the Degree and Requirements for the Award**a MSc or MA (by Research) and MPhil**

The degree of MSc/MA (by Research) or Master of Philosophy may be awarded to a student whose postgraduate research work represents a contribution to knowledge and shows a critical appreciation of existing knowledge in the field. The work must be communicated coherently in a thesis presented in a critical, literary and orderly way and, where appropriate, must show evidence of adequate analysis and discussion of results.

Master's degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated (Level 7, QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications):

- i 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
- ii a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship
- iii 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
- iv conceptual understanding that enables the student:
 - to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline
 - to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses.

b PhD

The degree of Doctor of Philosophy may be awarded to a student whose postgraduate research work represents a substantial original contribution to knowledge, shows a critical appreciation of existing knowledge in the field and contains publishable elements. The work must be communicated coherently in a thesis presented in a critical, literary and orderly way and, where appropriate, must show evidence of adequate analysis and discussion of results.

Doctoral degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated (Level 8, QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications):

- i 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
- ii 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
- iii 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
- iv a detailed understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry.

c MD

The degree of Doctor of Medicine may be awarded to a student whose postgraduate research work represents a substantial original contribution to medical or biomedical science knowledge, shows a critical appreciation of existing knowledge in the field and contains publishable elements. The work must be communicated coherently in a thesis presented in a critical, literary and orderly way and, where appropriate, must show evidence of adequate analysis and discussion of results.

The expectations of doctoral candidates are stated in b, i-iv, above.

d Professional Doctorates (DBA, DOptom, DOPhSc, PharmD)

The professional doctorate is equivalent to PhD standard (Level 8, QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications). It is a doctoral level qualification for professionals working in a particular field which aims to aid the dissemination, development and management of a range of professional practice and policy development. The research thesis or portfolio results in a substantial and original contribution to knowledge (either theoretical or applied to professional practice), shows a critical appreciation of existing knowledge in the field and contains publishable elements.

The expectations of doctoral candidates are stated in b, i-iv, above.

1.3 Qualification for the Degree

In order to qualify for the award of a degree by research and thesis a student must have:

- a enrolled as a research student of the University,
- b pursued a course of research within the time limits prescribed in these Regulations,
- c presented a satisfactory thesis or portfolio upon the subject of the research,
- d satisfactorily undergone a *viva voce* examination unless, in extraordinary circumstances, a written examination has been substituted under the provisions of Regulation 18e,

- e paid the appropriate fees and discharged all other obligations to the University.

1.4 The requirements for all Aston University Qualifications, including credits, and Levels of awards, are detailed in Aston University Qualifications Frameworks, REG/13/493 and subsequent versions.

2 ENTRY QUALIFICATIONS

- a MPhil or PhD applicants should normally have been awarded a Master's degree or first or upper second class Honours degree in a relevant subject or should have an award and/or experience deemed by the Associate Dean Research and the Pro Vice Chancellor Research or nominee to provide similar evidence of research potential.
- b The MD is aimed at persons in clinical practice. MD applicants must hold an MBBS or BDS (Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery or Bachelor of Dental Surgery) degree or equivalent, be registered with the General Medical Council or General Dental Council, and have at least three years of clinical or scientific postgraduate experience. Candidates should normally be in appropriate clinical or scientific employment at the University or a collaborating partner Trust of the University for the duration of the degree.
- c Professional doctorate applicants should normally have been awarded either a Master's Degree or a first or upper second class Honours degree in a relevant subject and should have relevant experience in the area of professional practice they wish to research. Any programme specific entry qualifications for professional doctorates will be included in the relevant Programme Description.
- d MSc/MA (by Research) applicants must produce evidence of having fulfilled the entry requirements as prescribed by the programme regulations relating to that particular programme. Applicants should normally have been awarded at least either a first degree from a recognised University or Institute of Higher Education or a qualification deemed by the appropriate School Research Committee to be at least of equivalent standing.
- e Applicants whose first language is not English must demonstrate that they have met the School's English Language requirement before enrolment.
- f Applicants will provide details of two referees, one of whom should be for the applicant's most recent period of study/research.
- g The following basic principles have been drawn up to assist Schools in developing procedures for the Assessment of Prior Learning, in cases where this is accepted by the School. Assessment of Prior Learning includes certificated learning (APL) and experiential learning (APEL) and may be considered in circumstances where a student wishes to transfer to the University having completed a period of research at another institution:
 - i the responsibility rests with the student for making a claim and supporting the claim with appropriate evidence, although advice and assistance on the nature of the evidence required should be provided by the Associate Dean Research. The School should determine appropriate fees for this service;
 - ii the experience of the student is significant only in so far as it can be identified as a source of learning;
 - iii academic assessment of certificated and experiential prior learning is the responsibility solely of academic staff;

- iv attention should be paid to the matching of a student's stated achievements and competencies against the requirements of the period of the research degree programme for which exemption on the basis of APL and APEL is sought;
- v in making offers for admission with exemption the Associate Dean Research should be sure that the student has already gained the required knowledge/skills for which exemption is awarded and that their ability to follow the rest of the programme will not be jeopardised;
- vi any exemptions on the basis of APL and APEL should be approved by the Associate Dean Research and the period of research for which exemption is granted reported to the School Research Committee;
- vii exemption may be granted for no more than two thirds of the maximum time allowed for submission of the thesis/portfolio, as defined in Regulation 14.1. Students are required to complete at least one full-time or two part-time years of the programme enrolled as students of the University. This does not include the writing up period.

Where a proposal for exemptions involving Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) applies to a group of students, the University recognises that whilst the experience of the group might be similar, the students' learning from it, and therefore the exemptions to which they may individually be entitled, might differ.

3 ADMISSION AND ENROLMENT

3.1 Admission

Students may only be offered a place if at least two members of University staff, one of whom must be the relevant School's Associate Dean Research, or their nominee¹², approve all of the following:

- a the student's entry qualifications (See Regulation 2 above),
- b the research start date and mode of attendance (See Regulation 4 below),
- c the proposed research topic (See Regulation 5 below),
- d the location of the research work (See Regulation 4 below),
- e the supervisory arrangements (See Regulation 6 below).

Prior to enrolment the student is required to accept the conditions of the offer in writing.

Any subsequent amendments to the conditions, for example a change in the supervisory arrangements, should be approved by the Associate Dean Research, or their nominee, and reported to the School Research Committee.

3.2 Enrolment

Before commencing research, an applicant for a degree by research must enrol as a student of the University, through the Registry, by completing the pre-enrolment and enrolment processes.

¹² The Associate Dean Research's nominee will normally be the Director of Research Degree Programmes or equivalent. Neither the Associate Dean Research nor the Director of Research Degree Programmes (or equivalent) should take action within these Regulations in respect of students they supervise.

4 DATE AND TYPE OF RESEARCH

4.1 Research Start Date

The student's effective research start date will be one of the following four dates in the appropriate academic year:

1 October, 1 January, 1 April or 1 July

The date (including the year) is determined and approved by the School Associate Dean Research and will be the date closest to the date on which the student enrolls. MSc/MA (by Research) students normally start on 1 October.

4.2 Mode of Attendance

Research students must be enrolled on one of the following bases:

- a as a student on an approved MSc/MA (by Research),
- b as a full-time research student,
- c as a part-time research student (pursuing research for the equivalent of not more than 24 weeks per year),
- d as a part-time MD student,
- e as a full-time MD student if they are a full-time employee of Aston University and are employed for the purpose of delivering a research project (normally as Clinical Research Fellow).

A part-time research student (MPhil/PhD/MD) may be permitted to attend the University for less than 24 weeks a year if approved by the Associate Dean Research on the recommendation of the student's Supervisor.

Most professional doctorate students will be registered as part-time students. Part-time is defined as pursuing research or study (including work-based research) for not less than 24 weeks per year, or equivalent, and not more than 24 weeks per year, or equivalent. Full-time professional doctorate students will only be accepted if they can demonstrate links which will allow appropriate interaction with practice as this will be required for assessment.

The normal time limits for each type of attendance are listed in Regulation 14, below.

4.3 Location of Research

A research student may pursue full-time or part-time research wholly, or partly, outside the University under the direct supervision of a University Supervisor if approved by the Associate Dean Research on the recommendation of the student's Supervisor.

All research students are expected to attend the University for the examination of the Qualifying Report or equivalent, and for the examination of the final thesis, unless the Associate Dean Research waives this requirement.

4.4 Specific Enrolment

All PhD and MPhil students are enrolled in the first instance for an unspecified higher degree by research and thesis. On satisfactory completion of the first year of supervised research, in the case of full-time students, or the second year of supervised research, in the case of part-time students, based on a satisfactory Qualifying Report each student may be recommended for progression to the MPhil or to the PhD degree programme (see Regulation 8).

The entry route to a professional doctorate will be specified in the Programme Description and may be via a linked Master's. Professional doctorate students are required to satisfy progression point requirements specified for their programme (Regulation 8.4).

5 PROPOSED RESEARCH TOPIC

- a Applicants for a degree by research must provide a project outline as required by their School of Study.
- b The proposed Supervisor must attest that the proposed scheme of work is capable of being pursued to the level and extent appropriate to the relevant research degree (see Regulation 1.2) within the specified time-limit.
- c Where a proposed research topic is concerned with particularly sensitive material, arrangements may be made to restrict the circulation of the resultant MSc/MA (by Research), MPhil, MD, PhD or professional doctorate thesis or portfolio for up to a maximum of three years through a 'Restriction of Access' (see Regulation 15.2).
- d The student and the proposed Supervisor are advised to ensure at an early stage of planning the thesis or portfolio that sensitive information will be excluded which does not clearly support the academic basis of the work, to avoid wherever possible the need to request a restriction of access to the finished thesis.

6 SUPERVISION

6.1 Supervision

- a Every research student must be supervised by a Supervisor who is a member of the Academic Staff, as defined in Section 1 of the Statutes or by an appropriately qualified and experienced senior Research Fellow. Research Fellows may only be appointed as Supervisor when their contract extends beyond the expected thesis submission date of the student. The Academic Staff Supervisor of an MD student will additionally have experience of research involving human participants and/or human tissue and appropriate academic scientific expertise to support Protocol development and delivery of the study.
- b Where the Supervisor is a Research Fellow a member of the Academic Staff must be appointed as Associate Supervisor.
- c A research student's supervision should normally be supplemented by at least one Associate Supervisor.
- d A Supervisor who has not previously supervised a doctoral candidate to successful completion will be supported by an Associate Supervisor who is a member of the Academic Staff who has supervised and examined at least one successful doctoral candidate.

- e At least one member of the supervisory team (Supervisor and/or Associate Supervisor) must be engaged in excellent research.
- f No person may be the Supervisor for more than nine research students (six FTE) at any time without the agreement of the Associate Dean Research; this number should be proportionate for part-time staff. A Supervisor who has not previously supervised a doctoral candidate to successful completion will not normally supervise more than three research students.
- g All research students must be given the name and contact details of at least one other member of academic staff from whom they may seek advice and support in the absence or unavailability of the main Supervisor, or in circumstances where the student finds the student/Supervisor relationship is not working well.
- h The second member of academic staff named as student advisor may be from outside the specific area of the student's research topic. The same appointment would normally continue throughout a student's full period of study.

6.2 MSc/MA (by Research)

Students normally must pursue full-time or part-time research wholly within the University under the direct supervision of a Supervisor.

6.3 Associate Supervisors

A research student's supervision should normally be supplemented by at least one Associate Supervisor. An Associate Supervisor must be appointed by the Associate Dean Research in the following instances:

- a where the Supervisor has not previously supervised a doctoral candidate to successful completion. This Associate Supervisor will be engaged in excellent research;
- (Prior to September 2013, new Supervisors were supported by an Advisor and the role of Advisor may continue for students enrolled before this date.)
- b for an MD student, an Associate Clinical Supervisor nominated by the collaborating NHS Trust. Clinical Supervisors are expected to hold a Consultant contract with the Trust in an appropriate clinical area and to have experience of acting as a Principal Investigator for clinical studies.

The appointment of an Associate Supervisor is also considered beneficial in the following instances:

- c where the student's research is interdisciplinary, a second member of the Academic Staff of the University may be appointed as Associate Supervisor;
- d an appropriately qualified and experienced Research Fellow may be appointed as Associate Supervisor where this would benefit the student's research;
- e where the Supervisor leaves the University and a replacement is appointed from among the Academic Staff of the University, the original Supervisor may be appointed as Associate Supervisor;

- f where there is a collaborative relationship with an external institution, a member of staff of the external institution may be appointed as Associate Supervisor where this would benefit the student's research;
- g to provide a less experienced member of staff who has not previously supervised a research student to successful completion with practical experience.

6.4 External Contacts

A member of an external organisation in which a student is pursuing research may be appointed in the role of External Contact. The External Contact is not formally involved in the supervision of the student and it is the Supervisor's responsibility to keep the External Contact informed of the student's progress.

6.5 Aston University's Code of Practice for Research Degrees

The Code of Practice for Research Degrees contains guidance on the responsibilities of Supervisors and research students.

7 SKILLS TRAINING

- a All students enrolled on the MD programme or with the aim of qualifying for an MPhil must undertake a minimum of 60 hours' appropriate skills training, including conference sessions, between the research start date and the submission of the thesis/portfolio. All students aiming to qualify for a PhD/professional doctorate must undertake a minimum of 90 hours' appropriate skills training, including conference sessions, between the research start date and the submission of the thesis/portfolio.
- b The choice of training to be undertaken is subject to the approval of the Supervisor, in accordance with School guidelines.
- c A list of the training undertaken must be submitted with the thesis/portfolio and sent to the Examiners before the *viva voce* examination.
- d A Supervisor may recommend to the Associate Dean Research or nominee that a student be exempted from the skills training requirements on the basis of prior learning or experience. The recommendation should normally be made at the time of the student's enrolment on the research programme.
- e All students enrolled with the aim of qualifying for an MSc/MA (by Research) will undertake appropriate skills training as part of their programme. Details are available as part of the appropriate programme handbook/information.

8 REPORTS

8.1 Reports

Students and Supervisors are expected to be in regular contact, normally at least every two weeks. There should be structured interactions at least every three months between the student and the Supervisor to report, discuss and agree academic and personal progress. A record of the outcomes of all such interactions shall be maintained, with a copy of the record being retained by both the student and the Supervisor and submitted with the Annual Report.

8.2 Annual Reports (MPhil, MD, PhD and professional doctorate)

- a At the end of each year of research a report must be submitted to the Associate Dean Research on the performance of each research student, including details of the skills training undertaken by the student during the year and a review of forthcoming training needs, unless the student has been granted an exemption from skills training (see Regulation 7(d)).
- b Annual reports must be completed by the end of each year following the student's research start date, this applies equally to full-time and part-time students.
- c The annual report submitted to the Associate Dean Research at the end of the first full-time year or second part-time year will contain a recommendation from an independent panel concerning the student's continuation on the MD or progression to either the MPhil, PhD or professional doctorate degree programme, based on the student's Qualifying Report or progression point requirements, and a *viva voce* examination (see Regulations 8.3 and 8.4).
- d In exceptional circumstances, an extension of no more than three months for an annual report may be approved by the Associate Dean Research or nominee.
- e Each report must be countersigned by the Associate Supervisor(s)/Associate Clinical Supervisor for MD and Advisor if appointed, and must give brief details of meetings between the student and Supervisor(s).
- f Details of annual reports received and student progression will be reported to the School Research Committee.
- g Each research student must be sent a copy of his or her annual report after it has been reported to the School Research Committee.

8.3 Qualifying Report (MPhil, MD, PhD)

- a Before the end of the first year of research, in the case of full-time students, or before the end of the second year in the case of part-time students, each research student must write a report on the research work. The report should be a minimum of 6,000 words or as specified by the School Research Committee and should be submitted to the School Research Office for forwarding to the Supervisor in the first instance. School Research Committees may specify a maximum length for the Qualifying Report.
- b The Supervisor (and the Associate Clinical Supervisor for MD students) will meet with the student to provide structured written feedback on the Qualifying Report in the form of a brief report. The submitted Qualifying Report, without further amendment, and the structured feedback report will then be submitted to an independent examining panel, together with at least three 3-monthly meeting reports. The student must then be examined on the content of the Qualifying Report at a *viva voce* examination conducted by the panel. The panel will comprise at least two members of the Academic Staff, normally including a Head of Research Group or nominee and at least one of whom will have previous experience of successful doctoral supervision and be familiar with the subject area. For an MD student, the panel should have experience of research involving human participants and/or human tissue. In addition:

- i the panel members should not have a supervisory role in respect of the student being examined. The Head of Research Group or nominee normally will chair the meeting;
 - ii either the Supervisor, or an Associate Supervisor nominated by the Supervisor to attend in their place, should attend the *viva voce* as an observer;
 - iii the student will have the opportunity to meet with the panel without any member of the supervisory team being present;
 - iv the panel should submit a report on the *viva voce* examination to the Associate Dean Research, with all panel members signing to agree the progression recommendation.
- c It is the responsibility of the research student to advise the examining panel in writing, before the qualifying *viva voce* examination, of any factors which may affect their performance.
- d On the basis of the student's Qualifying Report and *viva voce* examination, and taking into consideration the structured feedback and 3-monthly meeting reports, the independent examining panel must submit a report to the Associate Dean Research which includes one of the following recommendations:
- i that the student's progression to the PhD degree programme be approved,
 - ii that the student's progression to the MPhil degree programme be approved,
 - iii that the student's continuation on the MD degree programme be approved;
 - iv that an MD student's progression to an alternative degree programme, e.g. MPhil, be approved
 - iii that the student's enrolment should be terminated, subject to the procedures on representations outlined in paragraph 11e being followed.
- e The report on the student should also give a provisional title for the thesis/portfolio.
- f If a research student plans to write the thesis/portfolio in one of the languages taught and examined in that School (other than English), application must be made to the School Research Committee by the Supervisor, on behalf of the student, at the time of the qualifying report. The application must explain clearly the reason for the request and must demonstrate that there will be no undue restriction in the choice of External Examiner if the application is approved. Irrespective of the proposed language of the thesis/portfolio, the Qualifying Report must be written in English and the *viva voce* examination should be conducted in English.

8.4 Progression point (Professional Doctorates)

- a Students will be formally assessed for progression to the professional doctorate at a suitable point in the programme (normally one year full-time or equivalent).
- b The purpose of the progression point is to assess the student's ability to complete the relevant professional doctorate. It includes an assessment of the candidate's capacity to undertake research.
- c All progression points will include an appropriate *viva voce* examination by an independent, Internal Examiner.

- d Progression points may differ according to programme. A Qualifying Report as defined in Regulation 8.3 might be used as the progression point. Successful completion of a linked Master's programme, if one is included in the curriculum, might be appropriate if the programme provides adequate research skills training and includes a *viva voce* examination of the research report.
- e The progression point will be defined in the documentation for approval of the programme and approved as part of the programme approval process.
- f At progression point an agreement should be reached on the form of assessment (thesis or portfolio) for the professional doctorate.
- g The outcome of the progression point assessment will be one of the following recommendations:
 - i that the student's progression to the relevant professional doctorate degree programme be approved,
 - ii that the student's progression to an alternative degree programme, e.g. MPhil, be approved,
 - iii that the student's enrolment should be terminated, subject to the procedures on representations outlined in paragraph 11e being followed.

8.5 Progression at end of Second Full-Time/Fourth Part-Time year (PhD and professional doctorates)

Before the end of the second year of research, in the case of full-time students, or before the end of the fourth year in the case of part-time students, each research student must complete a minimum of:

- either an oral presentation of all or part of their research
- or write up all or part of their research as a paper (without the requirement to submit for publication).

The choice of task to be undertaken will be made by the Supervisor in consultation with the student. The format of the oral presentation will be specified by the School and will be a minimum of 30 and a maximum of 60 minutes; it should provide the student with a 'seminar' experience. The student should also write a brief report on what they have gained from the task. Structured feedback shall be provided to the student after the task, normally by the Supervisor and one of the panel members who assessed the Qualifying Report. A copy of the feedback shall be submitted with the annual report to the Associate Dean Research making a recommendation as to continued progression.

In the case of poor performance in the progression task, the student will be required to undertake the task again, within a specified time period not exceeding six months, in order to demonstrate improvement. Continued poor performance will inform the Supervisor's decision as to the student's overall satisfactory progress (see Regulation 11b).

9 ABSENCE

9.1 Work away from the University

Research students may, if permission has previously been received from the Associate Dean Research, undertake their research for an extended period at approved centres other than the University, or undertake appropriate field work.

Where research is undertaken outside the University in this way, it must remain under the control and supervision of the Supervisor. See also Regulation 4.3, Location of Research.

9.2 Vacation

A research student may be allowed up to six weeks' vacation a year by prior arrangement with their Supervisor, or a vacation allowance as specified by their sponsor.

9.3 Leave of Absence

A research student may apply to the Associate Dean Research or nominee for leave of absence of no more than two years on the grounds of pregnancy, illness or other sufficient cause, during which the research work is suspended and no tuition fee is charged, although the student is required to re-enrol. This period does not count in the calculation of time limits for submission of the thesis/portfolio (see Regulation 14 below), and is the same for full-time and part-time students. The decision should be reported to the School Research Committee.

10 TRANSFER BETWEEN MPhil AND PhD DEGREE PROGRAMMES

Provision is made in exceptional cases for transfer between the MPhil or MD and PhD degree programmes at the request of the student or the Supervisor subject to the following conditions:

- a any request for transfer between degree programmes should be submitted to the Associate Dean Research or nominee and must be accompanied by a detailed assessment of the student's work by the Supervisor,
- b the Associate Dean Research may seek independent advice on the standard of the student's work before making a judgement,
- c in agreeing any transfer between degree programmes, the Associate Dean Research shall specify the new submission date for the thesis,
- d the decision shall be reported to the School Research Committee;
- e in the case of an MD student, the collaborating Trust(s) agree to the transfer.

11 WITHDRAWAL FROM RESEARCH DEGREE PROGRAMME

- a If a student wishes to withdraw from their research programme, the student must notify their Supervisor and the Secretary to the School Research Committee in writing, stating their main reason(s) for leaving.
- b If at any time the Supervisor considers that a research student's progress is unsatisfactory and that the student is unlikely to complete the requirements of the degree, the Supervisor must report this to the student and to the Associate Dean Research, in writing. Where the Associate Dean Research is involved in the supervision of the student, the report should be submitted to the Director of Research Degree Programmes, or equivalent. Where the Associate Dean Research and/or the Director of Research Degree Programmes (or equivalent) are involved in the supervision of the student, an appropriate nominee (e.g. Head of Research Group) will undertake the role.

- c Where the unsatisfactory progress has arisen from an extended period of lack of communication over a period of at least three months and where reasonable efforts have been made to contact the student¹³, the Supervisor may recommend to the Associate Dean Research that the student should be deemed to have voluntarily withdrawn from the research programme. If the Associate Dean Research accepts the Supervisor's recommendation, the Associate Dean Research will formally notify the student of the decision and allow the student a reasonable period of time in which to present any mitigating circumstances, normally fourteen days.
- d If progress continues to be unsatisfactory following the initial notification in writing (other than as a result of an extended period of lack of communication), the Supervisor may recommend to the Associate Dean Research that the student be withdrawn from the research programme. Before deciding that a student should be withdrawn, the Associate Dean Research and the Director of Research Degree Programmes, or equivalent, shall give the student (aided by another member of the University¹⁴, or by a member of staff acceptable to the Senate, if desired) the opportunity to make representations in writing, or in person, or both, of any circumstances that have affected their progress. Where the Associate Dean Research and/or the Director of Research Degree Programmes (or equivalent) are involved in the supervision of the student, an appropriate nominee (e.g. Head of Research Group) will undertake the role. The student must normally be given a minimum of 10 days' notice if a full-time student or 20 days' notice if a part-time student, of the meeting. The student will be informed of the decision, in writing, normally within ten days of the date of the meeting.
- e A student whose enrolment is recommended for termination as a result of the examination of the Qualifying Report or progression point assessment will have the opportunity to make representations to the Associate Dean Research and the Director of Research Degree Programmes, or equivalent, as outlined in d, above.
- f If the student is dissatisfied with the outcome of the consideration of representations made under d or e above, they may appeal under the provisions of the University's Student Complaints or Academic Appeals Procedures, copies of which are available from the Registry web-site (see Regulation 24).

12 MSc/MA (by Research)

12.1 Definitions

MSc/MA (by Research) shall be awarded for individual research of, typically, 12 months' duration, to be examined primarily by thesis (normally a small number of taught credits will be included in programmes e.g. research methods training).

MSc/MA (by Research) have a defined structure but do not normally have a programme title as the students' individual research is the main assessment and each individual will normally present a different thesis title.

¹³ See Section XXIX of the Statutes: Service of Notices and Documents

¹⁴ as defined in paragraph 1 of the Charter and Section II of the Statutes. A Student Welfare Adviser from the Students' Union has been approved by the Senate to act in this context.

12.2 Programme structure and requirements

- a The overall learning outcomes for any MSc/MA (by Research) programme shall be at master's level as defined by the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (see Regulation 1.2a).
- b There will be a handbook for students which will include the programme structure and module requirements, and programme regulations.
- c The programme's regulations will specify:
 - entry requirements;
 - attendance requirements (if any);
 - programme structure including any required modules;
 - specific assessment requirements for modules including whether modules must be passed or completed.

12.3 Assessment

- a The pass mark for any assessed taught modules shall be 50%.
- b Students may not be reassessed in any module for which they have already obtained credit.
- c The thesis will be examined in accordance with sections 15-23 of these Regulations.
- d A student who fails to submit a thesis within the permitted time may be required to withdraw from the programme.
- e MSc/MA (by Research) may be awarded 'with distinction' if specified by the programme regulations for the award. To achieve an award with distinction candidates must be recommended for a distinction by the thesis examiners. The Examiners' decision is based on the quality of the thesis (see Regulation 19.1b) although they will also receive details of the taught modules as confirmation that this element of the programme has been completed.

12.4 Examination Board

Any taught modules will be assessed by Boards of Examiners. Boards of Examiners will be conducted as specified by these regulations and by the General Regulations for the Conduct of Boards of Examiners.

13 PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE

13.1 Characteristics of a Professional Doctorate Award

The professional doctorate is intended for professionals who can utilise and initiate research in relation to the development and management of a range of professional practice and policy development. The award is distinct from the PhD award in the following respects:

- students will be professionals normally conducting research in their own subject;
- within the programme of professional practice, the research leads to the production of a thesis or portfolio which makes a substantial original contribution to knowledge within the student's area of professional practice and of direct relevance to it;

- the research outcomes will contain publishable elements of relevance to the professional areas. The development and dissemination of ideas and good practice are key features of the objectives of the programme;
- the professional doctorate may be made available as part of a suite of linked awards.

13.2 Programme Description

Each professional doctorate award will have a Programme Description, which includes information about the programme structure and any programme specific regulations.

13.3 Title

The degree of professional doctorate is awarded in a professional area such as Education, Engineering, Business Administration, and other appropriate professional subjects. The title is to have currency in the academic area and designated as Doctor of 'subject' (abbreviated to D and subject acronym, or subject acronym and D) e.g. Doctor of Business Administration, DBA, Doctor of Pharmacy, PharmD, Doctor of Optometry, DOptom. The title will be approved during the programme approval process.

13.4 Structure of a Professional Doctorate

a Mode of study and duration

Typically professional doctorates include a minimum of three calendar years full-time postgraduate study, or equivalent, with study at Level 7 representing no more than one-third of this.

b Credits

The professional doctorate, in common with other Aston University doctorates, is not credit-rated. Where a professional doctorate includes a linked Master's programme or individual modules drawn from taught programmes the award or modules will be credit-rated in line with University regulations for taught programmes.

c Taught modules

All professional doctorate programmes include taught modules. Specific content will vary depending on the professional area of the degree but will be expected to contain:

- formal research training (including research strategies and methodologies),
- appropriate study of the field.

d Progression point

See Regulation 8.4.

13.5 Assessment

a Taught modules

Students will be required to successfully complete the assessment for a specified number of credit-rated modules.

b Research thesis or portfolio

- **Thesis**

Submission and examination of the thesis, by *viva voce*, will be in accordance with these Regulations.

- **Portfolio**

- i Submission and examination of the portfolio, by *viva voce*, will be in accordance with these Regulations.
- ii The portfolio material will demonstrate a substantial engagement with professional practice over a period of time; the portfolio must contain a body of evidence, which might include published work or innovative practice.
- iii The portfolio will include both an overriding line of argument and a critical commentary which sets the material in a theoretical and professional context.
- iv The portfolio must focus on an area/theme of direct relevance to the student's professional area of work, and aim to disseminate new knowledge and practice throughout the profession to aid its development.
- v The portfolio, taken as a whole, will make an original contribution to knowledge and professional practice.
- vi The nature and indicative components of a portfolio will be specified at the outset as part of the programme approval process, such as to enable the candidate to demonstrate (at the final examination) that the outcomes expected of doctoral candidates have been met. Details of assessment including the minimum number of articles, the minimum length of articles will be specified at the time the programme is approved. A minimum of two published articles and a covering paper outlining the overall line of argument will be required.

13.6 External Examiners

Viva voce assessment of the thesis or portfolio will be undertaken by (at least) two independent fellow professionals appointed as Examiners according to the following criteria and to the criteria for the normal appointment of Examiners (see Regulation 16.1):

- one Examiner must be external to the University.
- each Examiner will be experienced in research in the general area of a student's submission and, where practicable, will have experience as a specialist/professional practitioner in the topic(s) to be examined.

- the examination team has substantial experience (i.e. normally three or more previous examinations) of examining doctoral research degree students.
- taught modules should be considered by an appropriate Module Board of Examiners. Any linked awards (e.g. Master's awards) shall be considered by an appropriate Programme Board of Examiners. Module and Programme boards will be conducted according to University Regulations for taught programmes.

13.7 Linked Awards

Masters awards may be linked to a professional doctorate including MSc, MA, MRes, MSc or MA (by Research), Postgraduate Diploma and Postgraduate Certificate. The relevant General Regulations for these awards will apply to them.

14 TIME LIMITS FOR SUBMISSION OF THESES

14.1 Normal Time Limits

All time-limits are calculated from the student's research start date, and from 1 October for MSc/MA (by Research).

a Full-time students

	MSc/MA (by Research)	MPhil	MD	PhD/ Professional doctorate
Earliest date for submission:	not applicable	after one year	not applicable	after two years
Maximum time allowed:	one year	two years	two years	three years

b Part-time students

	MSc/MA (by Research)	MPhil	MD	PhD/Professional doctorate
Earliest date for submission:	not applicable	after two years	not applicable	after four years
Maximum time allowed:	two years	four years	four years	six years

14.2 Extension of Time Limit

- A student who is unable to submit a thesis/portfolio within the normal time limit may apply in advance for permission from the Associate Dean Research or nominee to submit late, if the student can provide good reason why the thesis/portfolio cannot be submitted in time.
- The application from the student should be made at least one month before the thesis/portfolio is due to be submitted. It must be accompanied by a timetable showing in detail how the thesis/portfolio will be completed within

the additional time requested and by a supporting statement from the Supervisor.

- c The Associate Dean Research may grant an MSc/MA (by Research) student up to three months' extension.
- d Normally, the Associate Dean Research may grant a full-time or a part-time doctoral or MPhil student up to one year's extension beyond the maximum time limits for full-time and part-time students given in Regulation 14.1 above.
- e Students who are allowed additional time in which to complete their thesis/portfolio must re-enrol for the period of the extension and will be considered to be 'writing up' students during this period unless specified otherwise.
- f The decision should be reported to the School Research Committee.

14.3 Time Limits if Transfer Between Full-time and Part-time Mode of Attendance

Where a student transfers between full-time and part-time mode of attendance, the guideline will be that one year of full-time research is considered to be equivalent to two years part-time research.

15 SUBMISSION OF THESIS/PORTFOLIO BEFORE EXAMINATION

15.1 Required Documentation

15.1.1 MSc/MA (by Research)

Within the prescribed time-limits, a research student enrolled for the degree of MSc/MA (by Research) shall present to the School or Programme Office as advised:

- a three unbound copies of a thesis/portfolio not exceeding 30,000 words in length, excluding appendices. The thesis/portfolio should be produced in accordance with the General Regulations for the Presentation of Theses.

15.1.2 MPhil or Doctorate

Within the prescribed time-limits, a research student enrolled for a doctorate or for the degree of MPhil shall present to the School or Programme Office as advised:

- a three unbound copies of an MPhil or doctoral thesis/portfolio produced in accordance with the General Regulations for the Presentation of Theses. A portfolio submission is not permitted for MD
- b two copies of the thesis/portfolio summary in the format specified by their School,
- c a signed statement by the student, countersigned by the Supervisor (and Clinical Associate Supervisor for an MD student), clearly acknowledging those parts of the work described in the thesis/portfolio which were done in collaboration (if any) and the extent of the student's contribution to those parts of the work, and confirming that the work has not been submitted for any other academic award,
- d three copies of a list of skills training undertaken (where appropriate) in the format required by their School.

15.2 Restriction of Access to Thesis/Portfolio

- a Access to a thesis/portfolio may be restricted for up to two years from the date of the award of the degree at the request of the Supervisor and student via the School Research Committee to the Graduate School Management Committee. The request must state clearly the reasons for requiring restricted access to the thesis/portfolio.
- b Restriction of access for a third year may only be granted in special circumstances and will not be granted for more than three years from the date of the award of the degree.

15.3 Time Between Submission and *Viva Voce* Examination (MPhil and doctorates)

The *viva voce* examination shall normally be held at least three weeks and no more than three months after the submission of the thesis/portfolio.

16 APPOINTMENT OF THESIS/PORTFOLIO EXAMINERS

All Examiners' appointments must be approved by the Senate or by the Vice-Chancellor or nominee¹⁵ on behalf of the Senate.

16.1 Normal Appointment of Examiners

Upon submission of the thesis/portfolio the Examiners should be nominated by the Supervisor and approved by the Associate Dean Research and reported to the School Research Committee in accordance with the following requirements (for professional doctorate candidates see also Regulation 13.6):

- a one Internal Examiner and one External Examiner must be appointed for each research student and both Examiners must be demonstrably research active. For an MD candidate, at least one of the Examiners should be medically qualified;
- b each Examiner will be experienced in research in the general area of a student's submission;
- c the Internal Examiner must be a member of the Academic Staff or Emeritus Professor of the University;
- d the Internal Examiner may not be the student's Supervisor, the Advisor to the Supervisor (if appointed), an Associate Supervisor, or otherwise involved in the supervision of the student e.g. a member of a supervisory team;
- e former staff and students may not be appointed as an External Examiner within five years of leaving Aston;
- f Associate Deans Research are required to monitor the nomination of examiners to ensure that the same External Examiner does not regularly examine students from the same Research Group;
- g an External Examiner must have previous experience of successful PhD supervision and the examination team must have substantial experience (i.e. normally three or more previous examinations) of examining doctoral research degree students.

¹⁵ The Vice-Chancellor's nominee will normally be the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research.

- h neither the Internal nor the External Examiner should have had substantial co-authoring or collaborative involvement in the student's work, and neither of the Examiners' own work should be the focus of the student's thesis/portfolio;
- i Examiners will be requested to declare any personal conflict of interest which might preclude their appointment.

16.2 Early Appointment of Examiners

The Supervisor may request that the Examiners are appointed before the thesis/portfolio has been submitted. The request must be accompanied by the thesis/portfolio summary and a statement by the student of the date by which the thesis/portfolio will be submitted.

16.3 Referee Examiner

If the Examiners are unable to agree upon a recommendation an External Referee Examiner will be appointed by the Senate, or by the Vice-Chancellor or nominee on behalf of the Senate, to make an independent report upon the thesis/portfolio (see Regulations 19.4 and 23.4).

16.4 Examiners for Staff Candidates

Any student who at the time of submitting the thesis/portfolio has been appointed as a member of the staff of the University, or who has ceased to be a member of the staff of the University within the previous 12 months, must be examined by two External Examiners, in accordance with the General Regulations for Research Degrees by Staff of Aston University and by Aston University Graduates for specified awards.

16.5 Changing an External Examiner

The External Examiner may be changed up to the date of the *viva voce* examination following a submission by the Supervisor for approval by the relevant Associate Dean Research and the Senate, or by the Vice-Chancellor or nominee on behalf of the Senate. The appointment of any replacement Examiner must be in accordance with Regulation 16.1.

17 ATTENDANCE AT THE VIVA VOCE EXAMINATION

- a The Supervisor is responsible for nominating the Examiners and for arranging the *viva voce* examination.
- b The following persons must attend the *viva voce* examination:
 - the research student;
 - the Internal Examiner;
 - the External Examiner;
 - the independent non-examining Chair.

The independent non-examining Chair normally should be appointed from within the relevant School except for staff candidates when the Chair should be from a different School. The Chair should not have had a substantial involvement in the candidate's work or have been involved in the appointment of the Examiners, but should have experience of research degree assessment.

The Supervisor may, unless the student objects, attend the *viva voce* examination. The Supervisor may be invited by the Examiners or the Independent Chair to participate in discussions but will be required to leave before any decision is taken, and should not sign any of the Examiners' reports or recommendations.

- c The Supervisor may nominate an Associate Supervisor to attend the *viva voce* in their place.
- d No other person may be present at the *viva voce* examination without obtaining permission in advance from the Senate, or from the Vice-Chancellor or nominee on behalf of the Senate.

18 CONDUCT OF THE EXAMINATION

- a Following their formal appointment each Examiner must be sent a copy of the thesis/portfolio by the appropriate School Office. The independent non-examining Chair must not be sent a copy of the thesis.
- b Before the *viva voce* examination each Examiner must read the thesis/portfolio and submit an independent written report.
- c A *viva voce* examination must then be held, normally at least three weeks after and within three months of the student submitting the thesis/portfolio, at which the Examiners test the student's knowledge of the research upon which the thesis/portfolio is based. Irrespective of the language of the thesis/portfolio, the examination must be conducted in English. The Examiners must submit a joint written report on the student's performance at the *viva voce* examination.
- d It is the responsibility of the research student to advise the Examiners, in writing, before the final *viva voce* examination, of any factors which may affect their performance.
- e If the Examiners are satisfied with the thesis/portfolio but not with the performance of the student at the *viva voce* examination, they may set the student a written examination and make their final recommendation on the basis of the student's performance in the written examination.
- f All MPhil and doctoral Examiners' reports must be submitted to the Senate or the Vice-Chancellor or nominee on behalf of the Senate, via the Registry or the appropriate School Office.
- g Examiners' reports for MSc/MA (by Research) shall be submitted to the appropriate Examination Board for information.

18.1 Video Conferencing

Video conferencing may be used in *viva voce* examinations only where the External Examiner or candidate is based at such a distance from the University (normally outside the UK) that they are unable, for reasons of prohibitively high cost, difficulties of time, or restricted mobility, to travel to the University at an appropriate time. The option of video conferencing should not normally be made available solely for the reason that the student has left the University after submitting the thesis/portfolio and does not want to return for the *viva voce* examination.

Where the candidate is the remote party, any materials brought into the conference room should be identified at the start of the examination and no one else should be in the room with the candidate except essential technical staff.

The examination will be recorded and a copy retained until the student has been awarded their degree.

Video conferencing may only be used with the agreement of the candidate, the Examiners and the Associate Dean Research.

Contingency plans should be made in case of technological failure or the need for the candidate to repeat the *viva voce* examination at a later date.

19 EXAMINERS' RECOMMENDATIONS

- a All Examiners' recommendations must be submitted to the Senate or the Vice-Chancellor or nominee on behalf of the Senate, via the Registry or the appropriate School Office.
- b A student may obtain a copy of the Examiners' joint recommendation relating to their *viva voce* examination on application to the Registry or the appropriate School Office. Alternatively, the Internal Examiner may provide the research student with a copy of the Examiners' joint recommendation at the conclusion of the *viva voce* examination.

19.1 Satisfactory

- a If the Examiners are satisfied with the thesis/portfolio and with the student's performance at the *viva voce* examination (or written examination, if Regulation 18(e) above is used), they must jointly recommend the award of the degree.
- b The Examiners may recommend the award of MSc/MA (by Research) with distinction if they are satisfied that the thesis is of exceptional quality.
- c The Examiners may not recommend the award of MD/PhD/professional doctorate to a student unless the student submitted for that award.

19.2 Satisfactory subject to Minor Revisions

If the Examiners are satisfied with the thesis/portfolio and with the student's performance at the *viva voce* examination but require minor revisions to be made to the thesis before it is bound, they must make one of the following joint recommendations and inform the student accordingly:

- a Doctoral Submission
 - i That the degree of MD/PhD/professional doctorate be awarded on completion of minor revisions within three months (see Regulation 20b);
 - ii That the degree of MD/PhD/professional doctorate, be awarded on completion of minor revisions within six months (see Regulation 20b);
- b MPhil Submission
 - i That the degree of MPhil be awarded on completion of minor revisions within three months (see Regulation 20b);
 - ii That the degree of MPhil be awarded on completion of minor revisions within six months (see Regulation 20b);

- c MSc/MA (by Research) Submission
 - i That the degree of MSc/MA (by Research) be awarded on completion of minor revisions, with 'distinction';
 - ii That the degree of MSc/MA (by Research) be awarded on completion of minor revisions, without 'distinction'.

19.3 Unsatisfactory

If the Examiners are not satisfied with the thesis/portfolio (irrespective of the student's performance at the *viva voce* examination), they must make one of the following joint recommendations and inform the student accordingly:

- a Doctoral Submission
 - i that the student be permitted to submit a revised thesis/portfolio for re-examination within one year for the degree of MD/PhD/professional doctorate (see Regulation 21a);
 - ii that the degree of MPhil be awarded (PhD submission only);
 - iii that the degree of MPhil be awarded (PhD submission only) on completion of minor revisions within three or six months (see Regulation 20b);
 - iv that the student be permitted to submit a revised thesis/portfolio within one year for re-examination for the degree of MPhil (PhD submission only);
 - v that no degree be awarded;
 - vi that the unsuccessful professional doctorate thesis or portfolio be recommended to the relevant Board of Examiners as equivalent to the Master's dissertation (in cases where there is a linked Masters only).
- b MPhil Submission
 - i that the student be permitted to submit a revised thesis for re-examination within one year for the degree of MPhil (see Regulation 21a);
 - ii that no degree be awarded.
- c MSc/MA (by Research) Submission
 - i that the student be permitted to submit a revised thesis for re-examination for the degree of MSc/MA (by Research) within six months of the date of the *viva voce*. In such cases no distinction may be awarded;
 - ii that no degree be awarded.

19.4 No Agreed Recommendation

If the Examiners are unable to agree upon one of the joint recommendations in Regulation 19.1, 19.2 or 19.3 above, they must submit individual reports to the Senate or the Vice-Chancellor or nominee on behalf of the Senate through the Registry or the appropriate School Office, making clear the reasons for their disagreement (see Regulation 16.3).

20 COMPLETION OF MINOR REVISIONS

- a The Examiners shall provide the student with details of the minor revisions required to a thesis/portfolio within two weeks of the date of the *viva voce* examination.
- b Minor revisions to a thesis/portfolio must be completed by the student in accordance with the wishes of the Examiners within an agreed timescale of three or six months from the date of the *viva voce* examination. For minor revisions to an MSc/MA (by Research) thesis a shorter timescale may be agreed by the Examiners, with the maximum being three months.
- c The Examiners must confirm that the minor revisions have been completed to their satisfaction before their recommendation is forwarded to the Senate or the Vice-Chancellor or nominee on behalf of the Senate.
- d The External Examiner may authorise the Internal Examiner to approve the student's completion of minor revisions. If there are two External Examiners (in the case of a staff candidate) one may authorise the other to approve the student's completion of minor errors.
- e The Supervisor will provide guidance on the correction of minor revisions.

21 RESUBMISSION OF A REVISED THESIS/PORTFOLIO FOR RE-EXAMINATION

- a Major or extensive defects in the content or presentation of the research entailing resubmission and re-examination of the MPhil or doctoral thesis/portfolio must be rectified within one year of the date of the *viva voce* examination. This time limit is applicable to both full-time and part-time research students.
- b Major or extensive defects in the content or presentation of the research entailing resubmission and re-examination of the MSc/MA (by Research) thesis should be rectified within six months of the date of the *viva voce* examination.
- c The Examiners must provide the student with details of the required amendments, in writing, when making their recommendation to the Senate or the Vice-Chancellor or nominee on behalf of the Senate. This should normally be within two weeks of the date of the *viva voce* examination.
- d Students should submit a commentary with their revised thesis/portfolio indicating how the amendments required by the Examiners have been addressed.
- e The student's Supervisor will provide appropriate and reasonable guidance on the revision of the thesis.

22 RE-EXAMINATION OF A REVISED THESIS/PORTFOLIO

The examination procedure must be as specified in Regulations 17 and 18, except where modified by the following provisions:

- a the resubmitted thesis/portfolio must be examined by the previously appointed Examiners unless the Senate or the Vice-Chancellor or nominee on behalf of the Senate is satisfied that there is a sound case for the replacement of any Examiner(s). An Internal Examiner who has since left the University and is no longer a member of the Academic Staff may continue in the role for the student concerned,
- b the appointment of any replacement Examiner(s) must be in accordance with Regulation 16,

- c the Examiners may require the student to attend a *viva voce* examination on the resubmitted thesis/portfolio.

23 EXAMINERS' RECOMMENDATIONS ON A RESUBMITTED THESIS/PORTFOLIO

All Examiners' recommendations must be submitted to the Senate or the Vice-Chancellor or the nominee on behalf of the Senate, via the Registry or the appropriate School Office.

The Examiners should normally determine their recommendation within three months of the student resubmitting their thesis/portfolio.

23.1 Satisfactory

- a If the Examiners are satisfied with the revised thesis/portfolio (and with the student's performance at the *viva voce* examination, if required, or written examination if Regulation 18e is used), they shall jointly recommend the award of the degree,
- b The Examiners may not recommend the award of PhD to a student submitting a revised thesis/portfolio for the degree of MPhil,
- c The Examiners may not recommend an award 'with distinction' to a student submitting a revised thesis/portfolio for the degree of MSc (by Research).

23.2 Satisfactory subject to Minor Revisions

If the Examiners are satisfied with the thesis/portfolio and, where applicable, with the student's performance at the *viva voce* examination but require minor revisions to be made to the thesis before it is bound, they must make one of the following joint recommendations and inform the student accordingly:

- a Resubmission for Doctorate
 - i That the degree of MD/PhD/professional doctorate be awarded on completion of minor revisions within three months (see Regulation 20b);
 - ii That the degree of MD/PhD/professional doctorate be awarded on completion of minor revisions within six months (see Regulation 20b);
- b Resubmission for MPhil
 - i That the degree of MPhil be awarded on completion of minor revisions within three months (see Regulation 20b);
 - ii That the degree of MPhil be awarded on completion of minor revisions within six months (see Regulation 20b);
- c Resubmission for MSc/MA (by Research)
 - i That the degree of MSc/MA (by Research) be awarded on completion of minor revisions within a maximum timescale of three months. The award may not be made 'with distinction'.

23.3 Unsatisfactory

If the Examiners are not satisfied with the thesis/portfolio (irrespective of the student's performance at the *viva voce* examination, if required), they shall make one of the following recommendations and inform the student accordingly:

- a Resubmission for doctorate
 - i that the degree of MPhil be awarded (PhD only),
 - ii that the degree of MPhil be awarded (PhD only) on completion of minor revisions within three or six months (see Regulation 20b),
 - iii that the unsuccessful professional doctorate thesis or portfolio be recommended to the relevant Board of Examiners as equivalent to the Master's dissertation (in cases where there is a linked Masters only),
 - iv that no degree be awarded.
- b Resubmission for MPhil
 - i that no degree be awarded.
- c Resubmission for MSc/MA (by Research)
 - i that no degree be awarded.

23.4 No Agreed Recommendation

If the Examiners are unable to agree upon one of the joint recommendations in Regulation 23.1, 23.2 or 23.3 above, they must submit individual reports to the Senate, or the Vice-Chancellor or nominee on behalf of the Senate, through the Registry or the appropriate School Office, making clear the reasons for their disagreement (see Regulation 16.3).

23.5 Completion of Minor Revisions

- a If the student is required to attend a *viva voce* examination, within two weeks of the *viva voce* examination on the resubmitted thesis/portfolio, the Examiners shall provide the student with details of the minor revisions required to the thesis/portfolio, and an agreed timescale of three or six months for their completion. For MSc/MA (by Research) a shorter timescale may be agreed by the Examiners, and the maximum should be three months.
- b If the student is not required to attend a *viva voce* examination, within three months of the thesis/portfolio resubmission date, the Examiners shall provide the student with details of the minor revisions required to the thesis and an agreed timescale of three or six months for their completion. For MSc/MA (by Research) a shorter timescale may be agreed by the Examiners, with the maximum being three months.
- c The Examiners must confirm that the minor revisions have been completed to their satisfaction before their recommendation is forwarded to the Senate, or the Vice-Chancellor or nominee on behalf of the Senate.
- d The External Examiner may authorise the Internal Examiner to approve the student's completion of minor revisions. If there are two External Examiners (in the case of a staff candidate) one may authorise the other to approve the student's completion of minor errors.
- e The student's Supervisor will provide guidance in the correction of minor revisions.

24 APPEALS BY RESEARCH STUDENTS

A student wishing to appeal against a decision of the Examiners may appeal on the grounds set out in the University's Student Complaints or Academic Appeals Procedures, copies of which are available from the Registry web-site. There is no right of appeal against the academic judgement of Examiners.

25 SUBMISSION OF THESIS/PORTFOLIO FOLLOWING EXAMINATION

25.1 Required Documentation

- a After the *viva voce* examination, the student must submit to the School Research Office two copies of the thesis/portfolio, bound in the manner prescribed in Regulation 4.2 of the Regulations for the Presentation of Theses and one electronic copy of the thesis/portfolio. All copies must incorporate any revisions required by the Examiners. The electronic copy must be presented in the manner prescribed in Regulation 4.2 of the General Regulations for the Presentation of Theses.
- b The copies of the thesis/portfolio must be accompanied by a signed statement from the Internal Examiner or the nominated External Examiner in the case of a staff candidate certifying that they are identical versions of the work assessed by the Examiners, except where minor revisions were made at their request.
- c The thesis/portfolio must be accompanied by the Deposit Agreement Form and the Third Party Waiver Form, both signed by the student. These will be retained by Aston University's Library and Information Services together with the electronic copy of the thesis/portfolio.

25.2 Distribution of Theses

- a Successful Candidates
 - i One bound copy of each thesis/portfolio judged worthy of the award of a degree will be retained by the University Library, the second bound copy will be retained by the School concerned.
 - ii The electronic copy of each approved thesis/portfolio will be uploaded to the Aston University Research Repository, together with a completed Deposit Agreement Form and Third Party Waiver Form. Doctoral theses will also be submitted to the British Library EThOS Service, together with the Deposit Agreement Form and the Third Party Waiver Form.
- b Unsuccessful Candidates
At least one copy of the thesis/portfolio will be returned to the student.

26 AWARD OF DEGREE

The Senate, or the Vice-Chancellor or nominee on behalf of the Senate, upon receipt of reports and satisfactory recommendations from all the Examiners, together with confirmation that all the requirements listed in Regulation 1.3 have been met by the student, shall approve the award of the degree.

27 WAIVERS OF REGULATIONS

Where, in the opinion of the School Research Committee, exceptional circumstances have adversely affected a research student which could not reasonably have been foreseen, the Graduate School Management Committee may waive any relevant part of these Regulations on such conditions as it may deem fit.

Applications for waivers of Regulations should be submitted to the School Research Committee Secretary on behalf of the student by the Examiners, if appointed, otherwise by the Supervisor.

28 COMPLAINTS BY RESEARCH STUDENTS

- a Research students who are dissatisfied with their conditions of work or the quality of their supervision should wherever possible discuss the difficulties with their Supervisor. In doing so, it may be appropriate to refer to the University Code of Practice for Research Degrees.
- b If a research student prefers not to discuss their concerns with the Supervisor, the student should approach the Associate Dean Research or their nominee or, where the Associate Dean Research is the Supervisor, the Executive Dean.
- c If the Supervisor or Associate Dean Research/Executive Dean does not resolve the student's difficulties, the student may refer the complaint to the Executive Dean under the procedures detailed in the School/Departmental stage of the Student Complaints Procedures, copies of which are available on the Registry web-site.
- d In circumstances where the Supervisor is the Executive Dean, or the Executive Dean has been approached in place of the Associate Dean Research, the complaint may be referred to the Chief Operating Officer or their nominee under the procedures detailed in the University stage of the Student Complaints Procedure.

29 MISCONDUCT IN RESEARCH

The University Senate has approved a Code of Practice for Dealing with Allegations of Research Misconduct (REG/14/602) and subsequent versions. In this context, misconduct in research is defined, in accordance with the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) definition as including, but not limited to:

- a fabrication;
- b falsification;
- c misrepresentation of data and/or interests and/or involvement;
- d plagiarism; and
- e failures to follow accepted procedures or to exercise due care in carrying out responsibilities for:
 - i avoiding unreasonable risk or harm to: humans; animals used in research; and the environment; and
 - ii the proper handling of privileged or private information on individuals collected during the research.

Examples of research misconduct would also include:

- the intentional, unauthorised use, disclosure or removal of, or damage to, research-related property of another, including apparatus, materials, writings, data, hardware or software or any other substances or devices used in or produced by the conduct of research;
- fraudulent applications for research funding or the misuse of research funding;
- the facilitation of misconduct by collusion in, or concealment of, such actions by others.

It does not include honest error or honest differences in judgements or in the interpretation of data.

The University takes a serious view of any such misconduct and cases of alleged misconduct are dealt with under the University's Regulations on Student Discipline.

Appendix 1 Professional Doctorates index

The full Regulations for Degrees by Research and Thesis apply to professional doctorate awards. The following may be most relevant:

R1.2d	Nature of the Degree
R2c	Entry qualifications
R4.4	Enrolment
R5	Proposed Research Topic
R6	Supervision
R7	Skills Training
R8.1	Three-monthly reports
R8.4	Progression point
R8.2	Annual reports
R4.4 & R8.4	Enrolment on professional doctorate programme
R11	Withdrawal from research degree programme
R13	Professional Doctorate
R14	Time limits for submission of theses
R15 to R26	Regulations covering Final Examination and award of Degree

Appendix 2 Doctor of Medicine (MD) index

The full Regulations for Degrees by Research and Thesis apply to the Doctor of Medicine award. The following may be most relevant:

R1.2c	Nature of the Degree
R2b	Entry qualifications
R4.4	Enrolment
R5	Proposed Research Topic
R6	Supervision
R7	Skills Training
R8.1	Three-monthly reports

- R8.2 Annual reports
- R8.3 Qualifying Report
- R11 Withdrawal from research degree programme
- R14 Time limits for submission of theses
- R15 to R26 Regulations covering Final Examination and award of Degree

RSP/GraduateSchool/AJB/September 2014

Replaces REG/13/488 and previous versions with effect from academic year 2014/15.