

# General Regulations for Research Degrees by Staff of Aston University and by Aston University Graduates

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## Policy Summary

These General Regulations, approved by the University Research Committee, set out the requirements of Aston University staff and Aston University graduate candidates for the degrees of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) by Previously Published Work, Doctor of Science (DSc), and Doctor of Letters (DLitt). They also set out the specific requirements of Aston University staff candidates for the degrees of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), Master of Philosophy (MPhil), and Doctor of Medicine (MD), including:

- Eligibility for the degrees of PhD by Previously Published Work, DSc and DLitt.
- The application, submission and examination processes for the degrees of PhD by Previously Published Work, DSc and DLitt.
- The specific requirements of staff candidates for PhD, MPhil and MD.

## Related Regulations, Policies, and Guidance

These general regulations should be read in conjunction with the University's [General Regulations for Degrees by Research and Thesis](#), [General Regulations for the Presentation of Theses](#) and the [Code of Practice for Research Degrees](#).

General regulations for other types of programmes operated by the University are available on the [general regulations webpage](#).

## Version Control

Reference Number	Version	Responsible Officer	Approved by	Approval Date	Effective Date
AU-GSMC-18-1835	A	Alison Birch	University Research Committee	July 2019	September 2019
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## **1 NATURE OF THE DEGREES AND REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD**

### **1.1 Master of Philosophy, Doctor of Medicine or Doctor of Philosophy by Research and Thesis**

The degree of Master of Philosophy (MPhil), Doctor of Medicine (MD) or Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) may be awarded to a candidate adjudged by the Senate to have successfully completed and been examined in a programme of study in accordance with the General Regulations for Degrees by Research and Thesis, supplemented by these additional regulations for staff candidates, where appropriate.

The general principles for any submission for a degree by research and thesis also apply (see General Regulations for Degrees by Research and Thesis).

### **1.2 Doctor of Philosophy by Previously Published Work**

The degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Previously Published Work may be awarded to a candidate adjudged by the Senate to have produced published work which is the result of a coherent programme of research and which has made a substantial original contribution to knowledge. The candidate will submit published work and will undergo a *viva voce* examination on the research by two examiners. The University does not allow submission by previously published work for degrees at Master's level (including MPhil).

The general principles for any submission for a degree by research and thesis also apply (see General Regulations for Degrees by Research and Thesis).

Doctoral degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated (Level 8, QAA [Frameworks 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.

### **1.3 Doctor of Science or Doctor of Letters**

The degree of Doctor of Science or Doctor of Letters may be awarded to a

candidate adjudged by the Senate to have produced published work, over several years, constituting a distinguished, substantial original contribution to knowledge, which indicates that the candidate has an authoritative standing in his or her subject, often internationally. The number and status of publications submitted is expected to be substantially higher than for a Doctor of Philosophy by Previously Published Work, and the applicant would normally be at a later stage in their career.

## **2 ELIGIBILITY**

### **2.1 MPhil, MD or PhD by research and thesis (staff candidates)**

Any member of University staff of at least one year's standing may be eligible to enrol for a Degree by Research and Thesis as a staff candidate, subject to the provisions of Section 2 (Entry Requirements) of the General Regulations for Degrees by Research and Thesis.

### **2.2 PhD by Previously Published Work**

2.2.1 Any member of University staff of at least one year's standing, including a member of 'honorary'<sup>1</sup> staff, may be eligible to enrol for a PhD by Previously Published Work subject to the provisions of Section 2 (Entry Requirements) of the General Regulations for Degrees by Research and Thesis. A visiting member of staff is not eligible.

2.2.2 Any graduate of the University (or a holder of the Diploma of Technology who pursued a full-time programme of study extending over at least two academic years in the former Birmingham College of Advanced Technology) of at least seven years' standing beyond the date of their first graduation in the University may notify the University of their wish to submit for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Previously Published Work.

2.2.3 Past employees of the University who are not graduates of the University are not eligible to submit for the degree.

### **2.3 Doctor of Science or Doctor of Letters**

2.3.1 A candidate for the degree of Doctor of Science or Doctor of Letters shall be:

either a graduate of the University at any time after the lapse of seven years from the date of their first graduation in the University. A holder of an external degree of the University of London or a holder of the Diploma of Technology who pursued a full-time programme of study extending over at least two academic years in the former Birmingham College of

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<sup>1</sup> Honorary Professor or staff holding a joint employment contract with Aston and elsewhere (Graduate School Management Committee Minute 18/157).

Advanced Technology is deemed to be a graduate of the University for the purposes of eligibility for the award of the degree of Doctor of Science or Doctor of Letters (University Ordinances, Part 5.2.4);

or a member of the staff of the University, including a member of 'honorary'<sup>1</sup>staff. Candidates must have held the post for a minimum of three years. A visiting member of staff is not eligible.

2.3.2 Past employees of the University who are not graduates of the University are not eligible to submit for the degree.

### **3 MPHIL, MD OR PHD BY RESEARCH AND THESIS (STAFF CANDIDATES)**

#### **3.1 Requirements for the award**

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

- a enrolled as a staff candidate;
- b pursued a course of research within the time limits prescribed in these Regulations;
- c presented a satisfactory thesis 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 General Regulations for Degrees by Research and Thesis 18(e);
- e paid the appropriate fees and discharged all other obligations to the University.

#### **3.2 Supervision by staff candidates**

A staff candidate normally should not undertake or continue the supervision of a research student whilst themselves enrolled as a research student.

#### **3.3 Time limits**

3.3.1 A member of staff will be expected to undertake the degree on a part-time basis, as defined in the General Regulations for Degrees by Research and Thesis. An MD candidate may enrol full-time, provided that 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).

3.3.2 If a candidate is able to work full-time on the research - for example during a period of study leave - this will not affect the time limits specified below.

3.3.3 The period of enrolment should not exceed two years (full-time MD), four years (MPhil and part-time MD) or six years (PhD), from the research start date.

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<sup>1</sup> Honorary Professor or staff holding a joint employment contract with Aston and elsewhere (Graduate School Management Committee Minute 18/157).

3.3.4 Each staff candidate must be enrolled for at least two years before submitting an MPhil or full-time MD thesis and four years before submitting a PhD or part-time MD thesis.

### 3.4 Submission of thesis

3.4.1 A registered staff candidate who leaves the University shall continue to be bound by the time limits specified in Regulation 3.3 above.

### 3.5 Examination

3.5.1 Staff candidates will be examined in accordance with the General Regulations for Degrees by Research and Thesis and these Regulations.

3.5.2 Two External Examiners must be appointed by the Senate to examine a thesis submitted by a staff candidate. The Internal Supervisor is responsible for initiating the procedures for appointing Examiners and for making the arrangements for the *viva voce* examination of a staff candidate but may not act as an Examiner.

3.5.3 No Internal Examiner or additional Examiner may be appointed for a staff candidate.

3.5.4 The following persons must attend the *viva voce* examination:

the staff candidate;  
the two External Examiners;  
an independent non-examining Chair appointed from a different College.

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. Independent Chair appointments should be in accordance with Section 1 of the *Conduct of the viva voce examination on a research student's thesis/portfolio*.

The Supervisor may, unless the candidate 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.

The Supervisor may nominate an Associate Supervisor to attend the *viva voce* in their place.

3.5.5 No other person may be present at the *viva voce* examination without obtaining permission in advance from the Senate, or the Vice-Chancellor or nominee on behalf of the Senate.

3.5.6 The conduct of the examination should follow the requirements of the General Regulations (Regulations 17-23) with the exception of Regulation 20(d) and 23.5(d) which are not applicable to staff candidates. Instead, one of the External Examiners may authorise the other External Examiner to approve the staff candidate's completion of revisions and will submit alongside the

copies of the thesis/portfolio a signed statement certifying that they are identical versions of the work assessed by the Examiners, except where revisions were made at their request.

## **4 PHD BY PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED WORK**

### **4.1 Application**

4.1.1 The application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by previously published work shall be in respect of work which has already been published, based either wholly or to a substantial extent on original work by the candidate.

4.1.2 The College will appoint a member of staff to provide guidance on the application for admission if the candidate so requests.

### **4.2 Application for Enrolment on the Degree**

4.2.1 The applicant must submit an application in writing for admission to the programme. This should be to the Associate Dean Research (or their nominee) of the appropriate College. The applicant should state clearly the title of the degree to which admission is sought i.e. PhD by Previously Published Work.

4.2.2 Applications shall be accompanied by the following:

- a details (but not copies) of the published work that the candidate wishes to be considered
- b a covering note indicating how and in what respect the work has made a coherent substantial and original contribution to the current state of knowledge
- c a statement indicating the extent to which the work has been carried out by the candidate and a clear indication of any parts of the work which have been carried out in collaboration with other parties/authors or which have been submitted previously for any other degree or qualification. Further, if the work is the result of collaborative research, a statement must be provided by the collaborating researcher(s), confirming the contribution made to the research by the candidate
- d a statement by the candidate as to whether or not the work or any part thereof has been submitted, successfully or unsuccessfully, for a degree of this or any other University
- e a Curriculum Vitae including details of research experience, degrees and other qualifications held (with the class of degree, subject, year of the award and the name of the awarding institution). Full particulars necessary to establish the candidate's eligibility as a graduate or member of staff should also be given.

4.2.3 An appropriate sub-group of the College Research Committee will examine the application for admission to determine whether the application should be accepted. One of the considerations will be whether the College is in a position to appoint an appropriate Mentor to support the applicant, primarily as an advisor on process and the coherence of the submission, including the



presentation of the published work, during the period between admission and examination when the candidate prepares their final submission.

- 4.2.4 The sub-group may request additional information before making a decision, including a meeting with the prospective candidate, the proposed Mentor and/or advice from an independent subject expert. The decision as to whether an application is accepted rests solely with the University and is not subject to appeal.
- 4.2.5 The Secretary of the College Research Committee (or nominee) will then advise the candidate of the decision and inform the Graduate School. The Graduate School will enrol the candidate and monitor progression.
- 4.2.6 Candidates whose application for admission is accepted will be expected to make a full submission by a specified date, normally no later than 12 months after the date of notification of admission. The candidate should prepare their submission under the guidance of the College Mentor.
- 4.2.7 Candidates whose application for admission is not accepted may reapply with no time limit placed on the revised application.

### **4.3 Enrolment and Fees**

- 4.3.1 If the application for admission is accepted the candidate shall be expected to enrol. A candidate enrolled for a research degree shall abide by the University's policies, procedures and regulations and is entitled to access the normal facilities provided for those enrolled.
- 4.3.2 On enrolment the candidate will be asked to pay the fee prescribed by the Senate and Council.
- 4.3.3 A candidate for the degree of PhD by Previously Published Work shall normally be required to complete a minimum period of six months during which the candidate will prepare the submission under the guidance of the College Mentor. The date of submission shall normally be no later than 12 months after registration.
- 4.3.4 A candidate for the degree of PhD by Previously Published Work is not required to undertake research skills training.

### **4.4 Submission**

- 4.4.1 Submissions shall be made in writing to the Secretary of the College Research Committee (or their nominee) by the date specified at admission.
- 4.4.2 Submissions shall include three copies of the previously published work (or other research output) and the overview of research on which the candidate bases their submission for the degree presented in accordance with the General Regulations for the Presentation of Theses:
- a The nature of research output varies from one candidate to another and also between research areas. The most important issue is the quality of

the research. The examiners must be convinced that the cited research output represents an acceptable contribution to the field and that the methodologies embodied in it are appropriate. In this respect, the issue of number is subservient to the question of the quality and impact of the output. As a guide the following would normally be expected:

- either            A minimum of four research articles from refereed journals (or other equivalent academic output)
- or                One research monograph
- b    Critical appraisal of the research contained within the submission is fundamental to the establishment of the coherence and quality of the submission and hence for the case for the award of the degree. The overview of the research is therefore of critical importance to the submission and should:
  - i     show how the work makes a significant and coherent contribution to knowledge, or to the advancement of the discipline
  - ii    provide an assessment of the impact of the publications contained in the submission, including an appropriate contextualisation of the submitted published works
  - iii   explain the relevance and criteria for selection of any methodologies used
  - iv    outline the themes that give the publications their defining coherence
  - v     where appropriate, provide a retrospective critique of the work
  - vi    state the candidate's role in cases of co-authored works and make the attribution of the candidate's submitted work clear to the examiners in the commentary
  - vii   show how specific publications have been tailored for publication (if any) (editing out of experimental data, for example)
  - viii review any publications by the author which are referenced but not presented as part of the submission
  - ix    pay particular attention to ensuring that factors such as availability of raw data from which cited publications draw conclusions, are fully taken into account in the commentary or accompanying documentation
  - x     include a title page and abstract.

## **4.5 Examination**

- 4.5.1 The College Mentor will nominate Examiners for approval by the Associate Dean Research or nominee. The appointment of Examiners and the award of the degree will be approved by the Senate through the Graduate School.
- 4.5.2 Candidates external to the University must be examined by one External Examiner and one Internal Examiner who shall be a member of the Academic Staff. Staff employed by the University must be examined by two External Examiners.
- 4.5.3 The appointment of the Examiners will be approved by the Vice-Chancellor (or their nominee) on behalf of the Senate.

- 4.5.4 Following their formal appointment, each Examiner must be sent a copy of the final submission. Before the *viva voce* examination each Examiner must read the published work and critical appraisal and submit to the Graduate School Office an independent written report giving reasons for judging the published work satisfactory or unsatisfactory.
- 4.5.5 A *viva voce* examination must be held at which the Examiners test the candidate's knowledge of the research upon which the published work is based. The College Mentor is responsible for arranging the *viva voce* examination. The following persons must attend:
- the candidate
  - the two Examiners
  - the Independent non-examining Chair
- 4.5.6 The College Mentor may attend the *viva voce* examination with the agreement of the candidate but will be required to leave before any decision is taken, and should not sign any of the Examiners' reports or recommendations.
- 4.5.7 No other person may be present at the *viva voce* examination without the approval in advance of the Senate.
- 4.5.8 The Examiners must submit to the Senate, a joint report on the candidate's performance at the *viva voce* examination.
- 4.5.9 If both Examiners are satisfied with the published work and with the candidate's performance at the *viva voce* examination, they must jointly recommend the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.
- 4.5.10 The Examiners may recommend the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy subject to revisions to the thesis within 3 or 6 months, at their discretion. Revisions do not include the addition or subtraction of published work.
- 4.5.11 If both Examiners are not satisfied with the published work (irrespective of the candidate's performance at the *viva voce* examination), they must jointly recommend that no degree be awarded.
- 4.5.12 If the Examiners are unable to agree upon a joint recommendation, they must submit individual reports to the Senate, making clear the reasons for their disagreement. In this case, an External Referee Examiner may be appointed by the Senate and asked to provide an independent report and recommendation on the submission.
- 4.5.13 If the External Referee Examiner recommends that an award should be made, the Senate may at its discretion approve an award.
- 4.5.14 No award shall be made if fewer than two of the three Examiners recommend that the candidate should be admitted to the degree.

#### **4.6 Submission after *viva voce* examination**

- 4.6.1 If an award is recommended to the Senate, the candidate shall supply two copies of the material submitted for the award to the Graduate School Office, as described in the General Regulations for the Presentation of Theses.
- 4.6.2 The University's Library Services shall retain one copy of the work approved for the award of the degree. The British Library does not receive a copy as all papers and books presented in the submission will already be in the public domain.

#### **4.7 Unsuccessful candidates**

- 4.7.1 In the event of a degree not being awarded, the University will retain one copy of the submission and the other copy will be returned to the candidate.
- 4.7.2 A candidate whose submission for the degree is unsuccessful may be permitted to resubmit an application not less than three years after the date of the previous submission. A resubmitted application will be considered afresh on its own merit and, if possible, should be discussed with the Mentor in the first instance.

### **5 DOCTOR OF SCIENCE OR DOCTOR OF LETTERS**

#### **5.1 Application**

- 5.1.1 Applications for the degree of Doctor of Science or Doctor of Letters shall be in respect of published work, based either wholly or to a substantial extent on original work of distinction by the candidate.
- 5.1.2 Intending applicants are encouraged to seek informal advice from a senior member of the University Staff, such as the relevant Executive Dean, before proceeding further.

#### **5.2 Application for Enrolment on the Degree**

- 5.2.1 If candidates wish to proceed, they should provide the Associate Dean Research of the appropriate College (or their nominee) with one copy of:
- a details (but not copies) of the published work that the candidate wishes to be considered
  - b a covering note indicating how and in what respect the work has made a distinguished, substantial and original contribution to the current state of knowledge
  - c a statement indicating the extent to which the work has been carried out by the candidate and a clear indication of any parts of the work which have been carried out in collaboration with other parties/authors or which have been submitted previously for any other degree or qualification. Further, if the work is the result of collaborative research, a statement must be provided by the collaborating researcher(s), confirming the contribution made to the research by the candidate

- d a statement by the candidate as to whether or not the work or any part thereof has been submitted, successfully or unsuccessfully, for a degree of this or any other University
- e a Curriculum Vitae, including details of research experience, degrees and other qualifications held (with the class of degree, subject, year of the award and the name of the awarding institution). Full particulars necessary to establish the candidate's eligibility as a graduate, member of academic staff or other eligible category should also be given.

5.2.2 An appropriate sub-group of the College Research Committee will examine the application for admission to determine whether the application should be accepted. One of the considerations will be whether the College is in a position to appoint a named member of Academic Staff who will provide guidance on the presentation of the work.

5.2.3 The sub-group may request additional information before making a decision, including a meeting with the prospective candidate and the supporting member of Academic Staff and/or advice from an independent subject expert.

5.2.4 The Secretary of the College Research Committee will then advise the candidate of the decision and inform the Graduate School. The Graduate School will enrol the candidate and monitor progression.

5.2.5 Candidates whose application for admission is accepted will be expected to make a full submission by an agreed date.

5.2.6 Candidates whose application for admission is not accepted may reapply with no time limit placed on the revised application.

### 5.3 Enrolment and Fees

5.3.1 If the application for admission is accepted the candidate shall be expected to enrol. A candidate enrolled for a research degree shall abide by the University's policies, procedures and regulations and is entitled to access the normal facilities provided for those enrolled.

5.3.2 On enrolment the candidate will be asked to pay the fee prescribed by the Senate and Council.

### 5.4 Formal Submission before Examination

5.4.1 Submissions shall be made in writing to the Graduate School Office, and must be accompanied by three copies of the published work on which the candidate bases their submission for the degree. The published work may be loose bound at this stage, as described in the General Regulations for the Presentation of Theses. Each copy of the submission must be as follows:

- a a **curriculum vitae**, including details of research experience, degrees and other qualifications held (with the class of degree, subject, year of the award and the name of the awarding institution). Full particulars necessary to establish the candidate's eligibility as a graduate or member of staff should also be given. The CV will be sent to the

Examiners but will not be included in the final bound thesis;

- b an **outline** or **synopsis** of about 1,000 words briefly stating the main theme or themes of the candidate's publications and indicating those areas which he or she considers contain distinguished, substantial and original contributions to the advancement of knowledge;
- c a **list of the submitted publications** grouped according to subject and numbered consecutively. For books, the title and the year of publication should be listed. For published papers, or chapters in books, etc., the title of the paper or contribution, full details of the publication in which each appeared, the year, volume number, part number and the first and last page should be given. A full list of authors should be given in each case. A 200 word synopsis of each book or chapter may be included if desired;
- d a **declaration** of any work which has been done in collaboration indicating precisely the share which the candidate personally has taken in each work, and the name(s) of the collaborator(s);
- e a **statement** whether the work or any part of it has been submitted, successfully or unsuccessfully, for a degree of this or any other university or educational institution;
- f a copy of all **papers** submitted, or **chapters of books**, where, in the candidate's opinion, it is not appropriate to submit the whole book. Photocopies of papers are acceptable; paste-ups are not. Where book chapters are lengthy they may be bound separately;
- g A copy of each of the candidate's published **books** submitted in support of the application. Teaching text books and 'popular' books or articles should not be submitted unless they show considerable originality of material or approach. Where a book is out of print and copies cannot be obtained, permission to copy the book should be sought from the copyright holder.

## 5.5 Examination

- 5.5.1 The Secretary of the College Research Committee (or nominee) will make informal approaches, on behalf of the Committee, to possible external examiners (without naming the candidate). Two external examiners will then be selected by the sub-group of the College Research Committee and their appointment approved by the Senate or by the Vice-Chancellor or nominee on behalf of the Senate through the Graduate School.
- 5.5.2 The candidate's submission will be submitted to the two external examiners for assessment. In order to encourage independent assessment, neither examiner shall be told the identity of the other examiner.
- 5.5.3 Each examiner shall make an independent report to the Senate on the candidate's submission for the degree and make separately to the Senate a clear recommendation whether or not the degree should be awarded.

- 5.5.4 If the examiners' reports both recommend the award of the degree, the recommendations will go forward to the Senate.
- 5.5.5 If neither of the examiners recommend the award of the degree, no award shall be made.
- 5.5.6 If only one of the two examiners recommends the award of the degree, an External Referee Examiner may be appointed by the Senate and asked to provide an independent report and recommendation on the submission.
- 5.5.7 If the External Referee Examiner recommends that an award should be made, the Senate may at its discretion approve an award.
- 5.5.8 No award shall be made if fewer than two of the three examiners recommend that the candidate should be admitted to the degree.

## **5.6 Submission after Award**

- 5.6.1 If an award is recommended to the Senate, the candidate shall supply two copies of the material submitted for the award to the Graduate School Office, as described in the General Regulations for the Presentation of Theses.
- 5.6.2 The University's Library Services shall retain one copy of the work approved for the award of the degree.

## **5.7 Unsuccessful Candidates**

- 5.7.1 In the event of the Doctor of Science not being awarded, the University will retain one copy of the submission and the other copy will be returned to the candidate.
- 5.7.2 A candidate whose submission for the degree is unsuccessful may be permitted to resubmit an application not less than three years after the date of the previous submission. A resubmitted application will be considered afresh on its own merit and, if possible, should be discussed with the supporting member of Academic Staff in the first instance.