

General Regulations for Degrees by Research and Thesis

AU-GSMC-19-2628-C

Applicable to postgraduate students in all years of
research degree programmes

2020-21



CONTENTS

1	GENERAL	6
1.1	Admission to the degree	6
1.2	Nature of the degree and requirements for the award	6
1.3	Qualification for the degree	7
1.5	Conflicts of interest	8
2	ENTRY REQUIREMENTS	8
3	ADMISSION AND ENROLMENT	10
3.1	Admission	10
3.2	Enrolment	10
4	DATE AND TYPE OF RESEARCH	10
4.1	Research start date	10
4.2	Mode of attendance	10
4.3	Location of research	11
4.4	Specific enrolment	11
5	PROPOSED RESEARCH TOPIC AND RESEARCH DATA ..	11
6	SUPERVISION	12
6.1	Supervision	12
6.2	MSc/MA (by Research)	13
6.3	Associate Supervisors	13
6.4	External Contacts	13
6.5	Aston University's Code of Practice for Research Degrees	14
7	SKILLS TRAINING	14
8	REPORTS	14
8.1	Reports	14
8.2	Annual Reports (MPhil, MD, PhD And Professional Doctorate)	14
8.3	Qualifying Report (MPhil, MD, PhD)	15
8.4	Progression Point (Professional Doctorates)	16
8.5	Progression at End of Second Full-Time/Fourth Part-Time Year (PhD and Professional Doctorates)	17
9	ABSENCE	18
9.1	Work away from the University	18

9.2	Vacation	18
9.3	Leave Of Absence	18
10	TRANSFER BETWEEN MPhil AND PHD DEGREE PROGRAMMES	18
11	WITHDRAWAL FROM RESEARCH DEGREE PROGRAMME	18
12	MSC/MA (BY RESEARCH)	20
12.1	Definitions	20
12.2	Programme Structure and Requirements	20
12.3	Assessment	20
12.4	Examination Board	20
13	PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE	21
13.1	Characteristics of a Professional Doctorate Award	21
13.2	Programme Description	21
13.3	Title	21
13.4	Structure of a Professional Doctorate	21
13.5	Assessment	22
13.6	External Examiners	23
13.7	Linked Awards	23
14	TIME LIMITS FOR SUBMISSION OF THESES.....	23
14.1	Normal Time Limits	23
14.2	Extension of Time Limit	24
14.3	Time Limits if Transfer Between Full-Time and Part-Time Mode of Attendance	24
15	SUBMISSION OF THESIS/PORTFOLIO BEFORE EXAMINATION	24
15.1	Required Documentation	24
15.2	Restriction of Access to Thesis/Portfolio	25
15.3	Time between Submission and <i>Viva Voce</i> Examination (MPhil and Doctorates)	25
16	APPOINTMENT OF THESIS/PORTFOLIO EXAMINERS	25
16.1	Normal Appointment of Examiners	25
16.2	Early Appointment of Examiners	26
16.3	Referee Examiner	26
16.4	Examiners for Staff Candidates	26
16.5	Changing an External Examiner	27

17	ATTENDANCE AT THE VIVA VOCE EXAMINATION	27
18	CONDUCT OF THE EXAMINATION	27
18.1	Virtual <i>Viva Voce</i> Examination	28
19	EXAMINERS' RECOMMENDATIONS.....	28
19.1	Satisfactory	29
19.2	Satisfactory subject to Revisions	29
19.3	Unsatisfactory	29
19.4	No Agreed Recommendation	30
20	COMPLETION OF REVISIONS	30
21	RESUBMISSION OF A REVISED THESIS/PORTFOLIO FOR RE-EXAMINATION.....	30
22	RE-EXAMINATION OF A REVISED THESIS/PORTFOLIO ...	31
23	EXAMINERS' RECOMMENDATIONS ON A RESUBMITTED THESIS/PORTFOLIO.....	31
23.1	Satisfactory	31
23.2	Satisfactory subject to Revisions	32
23.3	Unsatisfactory	32
23.4	No Agreed Recommendation	32
23.5	Completion of Revisions	33
24	APPEALS BY RESEARCH STUDENTS	33
25	SUBMISSION OF THESIS/PORTFOLIO FOLLOWING EXAMINATION	33
25.1	Required Documentation	33
25.2	Distribution of Theses	34
26	AWARD OF DEGREE.....	34
27	WAIVERS OF REGULATIONS.....	34
28	COMPLAINTS BY RESEARCH STUDENTS	34
29	MISCONDUCT IN RESEARCH	35
30	APPENDIX 1 PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATES INDEX	36
31	APPENDIX 2 DOCTOR OF MEDICINE (MD) INDEX	36

Policy Summary

These General Regulations, approved by the University Research Committee, set out the requirements for postgraduate research degree programmes and awards assessed by thesis (MSc or MA (by Research); Master of Philosophy (MPhil); Doctor of Philosophy (PhD); Doctor of Medicine (MD) and professional doctorates), including:

- Entry requirements and regulations on the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).
- The characteristics of different types of postgraduate research degree programmes, including MSc/MA (by Research) and professional doctorates.
- The typical duration of postgraduate research degree programmes.
- The requirements for progression and thesis submission.
- The requirements for the appointment of Examiners of research degree programmes.
- Recommendations available to Examiners of research degree programmes.

Related Regulations, Policies, and Guidance

These general regulations should be read in conjunction with the University's [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-18-1701	A	Alison Birch	University Research Committee	July 2019	September 2019
AU-GSMC-19-2628	B	Alison Birch	University Research Committee	July 2020	September 2020
AU-GSMC-19-2628	C	Alison Birch	University Research Committee	October 2020	October 2020

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 Education (EdD), Doctor of Optometry (DOptom), Doctor of Hearing Therapy (DHearing Therapy)) 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 Frameworks 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 must show evidence of adequate analysis and discussion of results.

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.
- 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 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, DHearing Therapy, EdD)

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 structures of professional doctorates, which may vary in the size of taught and research components, are detailed in programme descriptions for each award. Taught components must be passed, along with the research thesis or portfolio, for the award of the professional doctorate.

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 Credit and Qualifications Framework](#).

1.5 Conflicts of interest

- a A conflict of interest exists where, to an independent observer of a situation, a person's self-interest may cast doubt on their ability to take impartial and objective actions or decisions in a professional context. Examples of conflict of interest include personal and financial relationships.
- b Research students and staff involved with research degree programmes are responsible for taking appropriate steps to avoid potential or perceived conflicts of interest at all stages of the programme: application, admission, supervision, progression and examination.
- c Where a research student or a member of staff believes there is the potential for a perceived or actual conflict of interest, this must be disclosed in confidence to the Associate Dean Research or Dean of the Graduate School at the time it is first recognised as such.
- d The Associate Dean Research or Dean of the Graduate School will determine the appropriate measures to take to address the situation.

2 ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

- 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 in an NHS Trust for the duration of the degree. Data collection for the MD is expected to be undertaken as part of a project for which: the University is the sponsor or co-sponsor; or a project sponsored by an NHS organisation where the candidate is named as a student in documentation supporting the project's approval by the Health Research Authority. For NHS sponsored projects, a data sharing agreement will also be required to be in place before the candidate enrolls.
- 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 College Research Committee to be at least of equivalent standing.
- e Applicants whose first language is not English must demonstrate that they have met the College's English Language requirement before enrolment.
 - f Entry requirements for each individual research student will be stated in their offer letter.
 - g Applicants will provide details of two referees, one of whom should be for the applicant's most recent period of study/research except for the DBA programme, in which case one referee should normally be the applicant's current employer.
 - h The following basic principles have been drawn up to assist Colleges in developing procedures for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), in cases where this is accepted by the College. Recognition of Prior Learning includes certificated learning and experiential learning 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 College 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 RPL 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 RPL should be approved by the Associate Dean Research and the period of research for which exemption is granted reported to the College 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 within the normal time limits for the programme enrolled as students of the University.

Where a proposal for exemptions involving Recognition of Prior Learning 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 College's Associate Dean Research, or their nominee*, approve all of the following:

- a the student's entry requirements (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 4.3](#) 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 College Research Committee.

3.2 Enrolment

Before commencing research, an applicant for a degree by research and thesis must enrol as a student of the University by fully completing the enrolment process.

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 College 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

* 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.

- 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).

Full-time research is not compatible with full-time employment.

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 14.1](#), 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 assessment, 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 AND RESEARCH DATA

- a Applicants for a degree by research and thesis should normally provide a project outline as required by their College.
- 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.
- e Research data (methods and results) are core to research and should be managed in a secure, safe and accurate manner that would facilitate validation of research findings by independent researchers and audit, and in accordance with the University's Research Data Management Policy and any specific requirements of the student's sponsor.

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. A Teaching Fellow with a doctorate may be Supervisor for a student with the qualification aim of DBA, subject to the approval of the Associate Dean Research. 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. For students following the Doctor of Business Administration, a Process Supervisor will be appointed for the taught element of the programme; the Process Supervisor will fulfil the role of Supervisor until the supervisory team is appointed.
- b Where the Supervisor is a Research or Teaching 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 (see Regulation 6.3).
- 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 a doctoral student to successful completion as main Supervisor.
- 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 six research students 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 This member of Academic Staff 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 who is a member of the Academic Staff. A Teaching Fellow with a doctorate may be Associate Supervisor for a student with the qualification aim of DBA, subject to the approval of the Associate Dean Research. Additional Associate Supervisors may be appointed in appropriate circumstances. No person may have an overall supervisory load of more than twelve students (with a maximum of six as Supervisor) without the agreement of the Associate Dean Research; this number should be proportionate for part-time staff. 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;
- 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 additional Associate Supervisor is also considered beneficial in the following instances:

- c where the student's research is interdisciplinary, another 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 Academic 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 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 College 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) or professional doctorate 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. Before each 3-monthly interaction (which will normally take the form of a meeting), a report of the student's progress covering the previous three months should be submitted to the Supervisor by the student. The student and Supervisor will discuss and agree academic and personal progress, and a record of the outcomes of all such interactions shall be maintained electronically.

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 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.

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\(d\)](#)) or completed it as part of a professional doctorate programme (see [Regulation 7\(e\)](#)).

- b Annual reports must be completed before 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 before 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*. An extension granted for this purpose will not normally extend the duration of the research programme.
- e Each report must be approved by the Supervisor and will normally be agreed by the Associate Supervisor(s)/Associate Clinical Supervisor for MD. The report must give brief details of meetings between the student and Supervisor(s). A copy of the approved report will be made available to all members of the supervisory team.
- f Details of annual reports received and student progression will be reported to the College Research Committee.
- g Each research student must be sent a copy of their annual report after it has been approved by the Associate Dean Research.

8.3 Qualifying Report (MPhil, MD, PhD)

- a By the end of month 10 of the first year of research, in the case of full-time students, or by the end of month 20 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 College Research Committee and should be submitted to the Graduate School Office for forwarding to the Supervisor in the first instance. College 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. For students in the College of Business and Social Science, the report should also indicate whether the student intends to submit their thesis in the three paper format*. The submitted Qualifying Report, without further amendment, and the Supervisor's structured feedback report will then be submitted to an independent examining panel. Within two months of the Qualifying Report being submitted, and in sufficient time to allow the progression decision to be communicated by the end of month 12 full-time or month 24 part-time, the student must be examined on its content at a *viva voce* examination conducted by the panel. The panel will comprise at least two members of the Academic Staff, one of

* As detailed in Paper AU-GSMC-16-0016-A, approved by the Senate in March 2017 with effect from 2017/18 for students in Aston Business School and Paper AU-RC-18-1733-A approved by University Research Committee in April 2019 with effect from 2019/20 for students in the School of Languages and Social Sciences. The Schools now form the College of Business and Social Science.

whom will be designated as Chair; an Emeritus Professor who is a former member of Academic Staff is eligible to be a member of the panel. The panel will have a minimum of three successful doctoral supervisions between them and at least one panel member will 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;
 - 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. In the case of a less experienced Supervisor who is supported by an Associate Supervisor, the Associate Supervisor may also attend;
 - iii the student will have the opportunity to meet with the panel without any member of the supervisory team being present.
- c It is the responsibility of the research student to advise the examining panel in writing, through the Graduate School Office, 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 Supervisor's structured feedback, the independent examining panel must submit a report to the Associate Dean Research, agreed by all panel members, 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;
 - v that the student's enrolment should be terminated, subject to the procedures on representations outlined in paragraph 11e being followed.
- e A research student with a doctoral qualification aim who is unhappy with a recommendation from the independent examining panel for progression to a non-doctoral qualification may make representations in accordance with paragraph 11e.
- f The report on the student should also give a provisional title for the thesis/portfolio.
- g If a research student plans to write the thesis/portfolio in one of the languages taught and examined in their College (other than English), application must be made to the College 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 Internal or 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 of the Qualifying Report should be conducted in English (as must the *viva voce* examination of the final thesis – see Regulation 18c).

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, where applicable, e.g. a linked Master's, 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 one of the following:

- 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);
- or write up all or part of their research in the form of an empirical chapter that would constitute part of their thesis.

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 College and will normally be a minimum of 30 and a maximum of 60 minutes (including time for questions); 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 full-time research student may be allowed up to six weeks (30 days) of vacation a year, and a part-time student up to 3 weeks (15 days), 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. No more than 12 months will normally be granted in the first instance and a request for an unspecified period of leave of absence will not be considered. The period of leave of absence does not count in the University's 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 College 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 College Research Committee;
- e in the case of an MD student, the relevant NHS 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 Graduate School 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 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 student*, 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 University†, 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 or for progression to a non-doctoral qualification 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 on the University web-site (see [Regulation 24](#)).

* See University Ordinances, [Part 2.14: Service of Notices and Documents](#)

† as defined in University Ordinances, [Part 1.1: Members of the University](#). A Student Welfare Adviser from the Students' Union has been approved by the Senate to act in this context.

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.

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 description 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 taught component of the programme must be passed before the thesis is submitted.
- d The thesis will be examined in accordance with sections 15-23 of these Regulations.
- e A student who fails to submit a thesis within the permitted time may be required to withdraw from the programme.
- f 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](#)):

- 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.
- 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). An exception to the normal time limit may be permissible if a sponsor or funding body specifies a different timeframe for the research.

a Full-time students

Earliest date for submission:	MSc/MA (by Research) not applicable	MPhil two years	MD two years	PhD/Professional doctorate two years
Maximum time allowed:	one year	two years	two years	three years (see also Regulation 14.2)

b Part-time students

Earliest date for submission:	MSc/MA (by Research) not applicable	MPhil two years	MD four years	PhD/Professional doctorate four years
Maximum time allowed:	two years	four years	four years	six years (see also Regulation 14.2)

14.2 Extension of Time Limit

- a 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.
- b 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. The extension period available to a student on a different timeframe will be adjusted such that the thesis submission deadline is no greater than the maximum normal time limit in [Regulation 14.1](#) plus 12 months.
- 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 expected to be finalising their thesis during this period unless specified otherwise.
- f The decision should be reported to the College 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 Graduate School Office:

- 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 Graduate School Office:

- 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 or Doctor of Hearing Therapy;
- b two copies of the thesis/portfolio summary;
- 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 unless it is also to be submitted to a second institution as part of a formal cotutelle agreement;
- d if any part of the thesis includes work that is the result of collaborative research (e.g. in a three paper format thesis or as an individual chapter in a manuscript), a statement must be provided by the collaborating researcher(s), confirming the contribution made to the research by the candidate;
- e for a doctorate, signed confirmation from the Supervisor(s) and student that all data is located and secured in accordance with the University's Research Data Management Policy;
- f three copies of a list of skills training undertaken (where applicable).

15.2 Restriction of Access to Thesis/Portfolio

- a Access to a thesis/portfolio may be restricted for an initial period of up to two years from the date of the award of the degree at the request of the Supervisor and student through the College Research Committee to the Graduate School Management Committee.
- b The request must state clearly the reasons for requiring restricted access to the thesis/portfolio.
- c Restriction of access for a further period may only be granted in special circumstances.

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 nominee* on behalf of the Senate.

16.1 Normal Appointment of Examiners

* The Vice-Chancellor's nominee will normally be the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research or the Dean of the Graduate School.

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 College Research Committee. Where the Associate Dean Research is the Supervisor, the Executive Dean or Deputy Dean should approve the nominated Examiners. Examiners should be approved 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 of the University;
- d the Internal Examiner may not be the student's Supervisor, an Associate Supervisor, or be 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;
- h the examination team must have experience (i.e. normally three or more previous examinations) of examining doctoral research degree students;
- i 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;
- j an External Examiner should not have been involved in collaborative research activities with the other Examiner or any member of the supervisory team within the five year period prior to the *viva voce* examination;
- k 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 nominated by the Supervisor and approved by the Associate Dean Research 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 an employee of the University (i.e. not appointed on casual worker arrangements), or who has ceased to be an employee 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 should be appointed from the suitably qualified Academic Staff within the relevant College, except for staff candidates when the Chair should be 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 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 Graduate 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, through the Graduate School Office, 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 Examiners' reports must be submitted to the Senate or the Vice-Chancellor or nominee on behalf of the Senate, through the Graduate School.
- g Examiners' reports for MSc/MA (by Research) shall be submitted to the appropriate Examination Board for information.

18.1 Virtual Viva Voce Examination

Online platforms supported by Digital Services may be used in *viva voce* examinations only where the External Examiner or candidate is 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 a virtual viva 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 virtual meeting should be identified at the start of the examination and no one else should be in the room with the candidate.

Vivas may only be held virtually 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, through the Graduate School Office.
- b A student may obtain a copy of the Examiners' joint recommendation relating to their *viva voce* examination on application to the Graduate School Office. Alternatively, the Internal Examiner may provide the research student with a copy

* The Vice-Chancellor's nominee will normally be the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research or the Dean of the Graduate School.

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. The bound thesis should be submitted within one month.
- 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 Revisions

If the Examiners are satisfied with the thesis/portfolio and with the student's performance at the *viva voce* examination but require 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 revisions within three months (see [Regulation 20b](#));
 - ii That the degree of MD/PhD/professional doctorate be awarded on completion of revisions within six months (see [Regulation 20b](#)).
- b MPhil Submission
 - i That the degree of MPhil be awarded on completion of revisions within three months (see [Regulation 20b](#));
 - ii That the degree of MPhil be awarded on completion of 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 revisions, with 'distinction';
 - ii That the degree of MSc/MA (by Research) be awarded on completion of 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 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 forwarded to the relevant Board of Examiners for consideration as a 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 Graduate School Office, making clear the reasons for their disagreement (see [Regulation 16.3](#)).

20 COMPLETION OF REVISIONS

- a The Examiners shall provide the student with details of the revisions required to a thesis/portfolio within two weeks of the date of the *viva voce* examination.
- b 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 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 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 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 revisions.
- e The Supervisor will provide guidance on the correction of revisions at the request of the student.

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

* The Vice-Chancellor's nominee will normally be the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research or the Dean of the Graduate School.

- 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 nominee* on behalf of the Senate, through the Graduate 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. The bound thesis should be submitted within one month.

* The Vice-Chancellor's nominee will normally be the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research or the Dean of the Graduate School.

- 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 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 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 revisions within three months (see [Regulation 20b](#));
 - ii That the degree of MD/PhD/professional doctorate be awarded on completion of revisions within six months (see [Regulation 20b](#)).
- b Resubmission for MPhil
 - i That the degree of MPhil be awarded on completion of revisions within three months (see [Regulation 20b](#));
 - ii That the degree of MPhil be awarded on completion of 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 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 revisions within three or six months (see [Regulation 20b](#)),
 - iii that the unsuccessful professional doctorate thesis or portfolio be forwarded to the relevant Board of Examiners for consideration as a 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 Graduate School Office, making clear the reasons for their disagreement (see [Regulation 16.3](#)).

23.5 Completion of 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 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 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, with the maximum being three months.
- c The Examiners must confirm that the 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 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 revisions.
- e The student's Supervisor will provide guidance in the correction of 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 University 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 Graduate School Office one copy of the thesis/portfolio, printed in the manner prescribed in [Regulation 4.2](#) of the General Regulations for the Presentation of Theses and one electronic copy of the thesis/portfolio. Both copies of the thesis 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.

* The Vice-Chancellor's nominee will normally be the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research or the Dean of the Graduate School.

- 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 revisions were made at their request.
- c The thesis/portfolio must be accompanied by the Research Degree Deposit Agreement Form signed by the student. This Form will be retained by Aston University's Library Services together with the electronic copy of the thesis/portfolio.

25.2 Distribution of Theses

The approved thesis/portfolio will normally be uploaded to the Aston University Research Repository. Doctoral theses will normally be harvested by the British Library EThOS Service.

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 College 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 Graduate School 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 College/Departmental stage of the Student Complaints Procedures, copies of which are available on the University 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

* The Vice-Chancellor's nominee will normally be the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research or the Dean of the Graduate School.

complaint may be referred to the Chief of Operations and Estates or their nominee under the procedures detailed in Stage 2 of the Student Complaints Procedure.

29 MISCONDUCT IN RESEARCH

The University Research Committee has approved Research Integrity Assurance Procedures (AU-RC-18-1563-A 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.

30 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 Requirements
R4.4	Enrolment
R5	Proposed Research Topic and Research Data
R6	Supervision
R7	Skills Training
R8.1	Three-monthly reports
R8.4	Progression point
R8.2	Annual reports
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

31 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 Requirements
R4.4	Enrolment
R5	Proposed Research Topic and Research Data
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

SAS/Graduate School/AJB/July 2020

Replaces AU-GSMC-18-1701-A and previous versions with effect from academic year 2020/21.