

PGR Final Assessment: Guidance for Examiners

Graduate School 2020

Postgraduate Research Degrees: Guidance for Examiners

Applicable to all PGR programmes: PhD, DPhil, MPhil and Professional Doctorate programmes

Dear Examiner

Thank you for agreeing to examine a PGR student for one of the University of the West of England, Bristol's awards.

This document aims to provide you with the necessary information for examining postgraduate research awards at UWE, Bristol. We hope the information will answer many of your queries and clarify our procedures.

You should expect to receive contact from the UWE, Bristol, Graduate School in relation to the arrangements for the viva voce and to guide you through the relevant administrative processes for the final assessment of the research degree. For the viva itself and post-viva, your primary contact will be with the Independent Chair. If for any reason you need contact with the candidate this must be facilitated either by the Independent Chair or the Graduate School to avoid any direct contact with the candidate.

If after reading this document you still have questions or concerns over the assessment process, please do not hesitate to contact us as follows:

PGR Assessment Manager: Helen Jackson 0117 3282877

PGR Assessment Officer: Pat Hughes 0117 3282544

PGR Assessment Administrators: Helen Mulligan 0117 3281072 or Lisa Duvall 0117 3286009

Office email for the final assessment: research.degrees@uwe.ac.uk

Award Criteria

The University's Doctoral and MPhil criteria are detailed in each of the descriptors below. They are applicable to the respective PGR programmes: PhD, DPhil, MPhil, MPhil by publication and Professional Doctorate programmes.

Research degrees are criteria-driven awards and you are being asked to assess the candidate and their submitted work against them. The criteria are in the award descriptors as follows:

The Doctoral descriptor

- 1) A doctorate is awarded to a candidate who:
 - a) has conducted enquiry leading to the creation and interpretation of new knowledge through original research or other advanced scholarship, shown by satisfying scholarly review by accomplished and recognised scholars in the field;
 - b) can demonstrate a critical understanding of the current state of knowledge in that field of theory and/or practice;
 - c) shows the ability to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge at the forefront of the discipline or field of practice, including the capacity to adjust the project design in the light of emergent issues and understandings;
 - d) can demonstrate a critical understanding of the methodology of enquiry;
 - e) has developed independent judgement of issues and ideas in the field of research and/or practice and is able to communicate and justify that judgement to appropriate audiences;
 - f) can critically reflect on his/her work and evaluate its strengths and weaknesses, including understanding validation procedures.

The MPhil descriptor:

- 2 A Master of Philosophy is awarded to a candidate who:
 - a) has engaged in enquiry which makes a contribution to knowledge within his/her field of study;
 - b) can demonstrate a systematic understanding of the current state of knowledge within his/her field of theory and/or practice;
 - c) shows the ability to conceptualise, design and implement a project capable of contributing new knowledge close to the forefront of the discipline or field of practice;
 - d) can demonstrate a sound understanding of the methodology and techniques of enquiry relevant to the discipline or field of study
 - e) has developed a capacity to form judgements of issues and ideas in the field of research and/or practice and communicate and justify these to relevant audiences;
 - f) can critically reflect on his/her work and evaluate its strengths and weaknesses.

Difference between awards

- 3 *The overall difference between a doctorate and an MPhil is not one of time or length but rather of depth and sophistication.*

Format of the written thesis

- 4 The format of a written thesis for Professional Doctorates may differ from the traditional doctorate. Where there is a distinct difference, this has been included in the appendices at the end of this document.
- 5 For MPhil and PhD written theses, after the contents, abstract and other front material, candidates must include; a) a chapter that introduces and contextualises the work, b) the body of work to be assessed, and c) a final chapter that draws the works together and makes the claim for original contribution to knowledge. The body of work to be assessed *can* include written outputs produced during the period of registration. The DPhil thesis *must* be based on research publications, and can include those produced from before the period of registration.
- 6 In all theses the contribution of the candidate to any co-authored outputs must be clear.

To guide examiners there is a video explaining the rationale for MPhil and PhD thesis format that can be found [here](#).

Confidentiality of thesis

- 7 Examiners are reminded that during the examination process and before the thesis is available on the UWE Repository, the content of the thesis is confidential. On occasions a thesis or part of a thesis will be subject to a confidentiality agreement and kept on restricted access for an agreed period of time. Where this is the case external examiners will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement as part of their contract.

Membership of examination teams

- 8 The examining panels for viva voce examinations are appointed by the Research Degrees Award Board. The examination team will normally consist of one external examiner and one internal examiner. Where the candidate is or has recently been employed by the university, a second external examiner will be appointed to the examination team. An Independent Chair will be appointed to complete each panel.
- 9 The Independent Chair has the role of providing information and guidance for the examiners, but does not take a direct part in the examination of the thesis or in the panel's decision-making. With the agreement of the candidate the supervisor(s) may also attend but takes no active part, unless specifically asked to do so.

Word count of theses/critical commentary (DPhil)

- 10 Candidates are expected to provide the word count of their thesis. The University has a [word count policy](#) for students and examiners. The text of the thesis should normally not exceed the following word length (excluding ancillary data):
 - a. For science, engineering, creative practice/performing arts, art and design subject areas:
PhD 40,000

Professional Doctorate, 35,000 or per the programme specification
MPhil 20,000

- b. For business and management, humanities, social sciences, health and social care and education subject areas:
PhD 80,000
Professional Doctorate 60,000, or as per programme specification
MPhil 40,000
- c. An MPhil or PhD thesis that incorporates research outputs within the body of the work submitted may be expected to be longer than a written thesis submission that does not incorporate them and may exceed the maximum permitted for that discipline by up to 10,000 words.
- d. For DPhil/MPhil by publication, the critical commentary is not expected to exceed 20,000 words with no minimum limit. There is no limit to the accompanying submission/s.

Independent preliminary reports

- 11 Each examiner is required to produce an independent preliminary report (i.e. examiners should not confer) using the designated form (RD10 or RD11, sent via email) and to submit it at least a week prior to the viva. Candidates are not routinely given access to these reports, but examiners must be aware that under FOI candidates can request access to these reports after the examination.
- 12 The preliminary report includes a Conflicts of Interest statement. If, after reading the thesis, you feel there may be a conflict of interest, please contact the PGR Assessment Team in the Graduate School to discuss the issue as soon as possible.

Planning the viva

- 13 In general, the duration of a viva is likely to be between 90 minutes and three hours. The examiners should meet with the Independent Chair before the start of the examination in order to plan the agenda. This should include identification of the major areas to be covered in the viva, and deciding which of the examiners should lead the questioning on each of these. The Independent Chair will establish whether the candidate has asked to start the viva with a short presentation.
- 14 It may be necessary to vary the arrangements for the viva where candidates have previously alerted the University of medical or other conditions that may impact upon their ability to undertake the viva in the usual way. Where reasonable adjustments are proposed examiners will be notified beforehand. The Independent Chair will be responsible for ensuring that, where required, the reasonable adjustments are enacted.

Conduct of the viva

- 15 The Independent Chair will start the viva, ensuring that all relevant introductions are made and that the candidate understands the roles of those present. If a presentation is made it

should take a maximum of 10 minutes and must not include any new material that is not already in the thesis. The viva will then, in general, follow the agenda, and the Independent Chair will ensure that an appropriate focus on the candidate's work is maintained.

Outcome of the viva

16 After the conclusion of the examination the examiners and the Independent Chair will meet to discuss and determine the recommended outcome. In so doing they should refer to the relevant qualification descriptor to ensure that there is appropriate and adequate evidence that the descriptor is met within the written thesis/collection of published works, and the viva voce examination. Section 17 below provides the possible outcomes, including what is usually expected for each outcome. The descriptions of each outcome are not intended to constrain the decisions of the examiners, but to provide information which may assist in reaching a decision.

17 The recommendations available to the examiners following the viva voce examination are:

A. The candidate fulfils the criteria for the award on which they are registered:

PASS; corrections; amendments - minor and major

The candidate fulfils the Doctoral/MPhil award criteria and examiners may recommend that the candidate be awarded the degree:

- i. Without correction or amendment;
- ii. Subject to **correction** of presentational/typographical errors within the material* (maximum 4 weeks FT/6 weeks PT). Corrections to be approved by one or both/all examiners;
- iii. Subject to **minor amendment** of the material* as indicated by the examiners and which can reasonably be completed within a maximum 12 weeks FT/18 weeks PT. Amendments to be approved by one or both/all examiners;
- iv. Subject to **major amendment**. The material* submitted displays some deficiencies of content, analysis and/or presentation in areas specified by the examiners requiring additional work which can reasonably be expected to be completed within a maximum 6 months FT/9 months PT. No re-examination is required, amendments to be approved by all examiners.

B. The candidate does not currently fulfil the criteria for the award on which they are registered:

REFERRED for resubmission and re-examination

The candidate does not currently fulfil the Doctoral/MPhil criteria and the material* as submitted displays significant deficiencies of content and/or presentation in areas specified by the examiners. The candidate is permitted to revise and re-submit the material for the degree and be re-examined on one further occasion with or without a further viva. Revisions indicated by examiners may reasonably be expected to be completed within a maximum 12 months FT/18 months PT. The re-examination shall be of the submitted material as a whole and by all examiners.

C. Additional outcomes for PhD or DPhil examination only:

i. MPhil with amendments

The candidate does not fulfil the doctoral award descriptor criteria but does meet the criteria for MPhil and may be recommended for this award subject to amendment of the material* in a manner and to a timescale as recommended by the examiners (**up to** a maximum of 6 months FT/9 months PT). No further examination is required. Amendments to be approved by one or both/all examiners;

Or

ii. Resubmit and be examined for MPhil

The candidate does not fulfil the doctoral award criteria but has the potential to meet the criteria for MPhil and may revise and resubmit the material* as indicated by the examiners for examination for the award of MPhil (within a maximum of 12 months FT/18 months PT). The examination shall be of the submitted material as a whole, shall include a viva and shall be undertaken by all examiners.

D. DEGREE NOT AWARDED

The candidate is not awarded the degree and is not permitted to be re-examined. (Unsuccessful candidates for DPhil/MPhil by publication may be permitted to re-apply after a period of three years.)

*NB. Material in the case of DPhil/MPhil by publication refers to the critical commentary element of the submission.

Examining the Professional Doctorate

- 18 The process and outcomes for the examination of the thesis for a professional doctorate are identical to those set out above for the traditional PhD, with the exception that outcomes at C i. or ii. (the award of an MPhil), are not available as recommendations from a professional doctorate viva. Additional information on each Professional Doctorate can be found in Appendices one to three below.
- 19 The UWE Doctoral Descriptor sets out in broad terms the requirement for the award of a doctorate of the University. In some cases, usually for Professional Doctorates, the design of the programme will include a number of specific learning outcomes defined to ensure that a successful candidate can meet the requirements of the particular professions to which the programme relates. The professional doctorate is based on a period of directed and assessed study, and a period of individually supervised research leading to a substantial piece of original research work comparable in terms of standard with the traditional supervised PhD. Some of the learning outcomes that are specific to Professional Doctorates will be assessed through taught elements of the programme rather than through the thesis so examiners of final theses are not being asked to assess these; the exception to this is where there are specific objectives focused on the development of research skills directly applicable to the professional context. Not less than 25% and not more than 50% of the total duration of the professional doctorate programme is devoted to directed study and will accrue between 120 and 270 credits at level M (dependent on the doctorate concerned).

Examining the DPhil award

- 20 The doctoral descriptor applies to the DPhil and forms the basis for the assessment of the award. The submission for a DPhil award is in two parts. The first is a set of publications, which must meet the basic test of reporting academic research, and the second is an integrative commentary (critical commentary), not exceeding 20,000 words (but in some cases significantly less), on the work.
- 21 There are no set specific guidelines for the number of publications that are needed to satisfy the criteria. The critical test is whether the total amount of research, original creative work, or original scholarship reported is commensurate with the demands of the thesis-based PhD in terms of demonstrating doctoral descriptor. This will normally mean a lower volume of output in terms of words, particularly if the work is made up entirely of papers. Where there is one or more books, the total length in words will be similar to, or may exceed that of a PhD thesis.
- 22 Subject to the points made above, the conduct of the viva is no different from that for the PhD, in terms of either process or scale. However, the examining panel will consist of two external examiners and an Independent Chair. There will be no internal examiner.

Reporting the recommendations from the viva

- 23 The report from the viva is not a summary of the thesis or of the viva but a recommended outcome accompanied by necessary corrections, amendments, or changes for resubmission.
- 24 When the outcome is either A. ii., iii., iv. or outcome B, the examiners, co-ordinated by the Independent Chair, must provide a list of the corrections and/or amendments that need to be made to the thesis. Examiners should note that information contained within this report will be passed directly to the candidate. The examiners are not required to list typographical errors, and it remains the responsibility of the candidate to ensure that the final thesis is as free of such errors as possible. Examiners may choose to alert the candidate to typographical errors, but it must be recognised that this falls outside the specified role of an examiner. Annotations on an examiner's copy of the thesis indicating minor presentational/typographical errors of this nature may be passed to the candidate.
- 25 Examiners may sometimes want to make suggestions or provide general guidance to the candidate about ways in which the thesis might be improved, for example for publication, but these are suggestions only and the candidate will not be assessed or reassessed on them. These suggestions should be made in the separate section of the examination outcome form.

Clarification of viva outcome requirements

- 26 Candidates are given a period of 21 days from the Award Board notification of their viva outcome in which to ask for any clarification of the requirements set by the examiners. During this period, examiners may be contacted by the Independent Chair to provide clarification or answer queries that have been raised by the candidate. You may find it helpful to discuss your reply with the other examiner/s, however, please do not contact the candidate directly. All replies should be directed through the Independent Chair or the Graduate School.

Outcomes of the re-examination following resubmission

- 27 Resubmission is a referral outcome and therefore the recommended outcomes available to examiners are the same as for the first examination, other than a further resubmission outcome for the award on which the candidate was originally registered (ie. outcome B at para 17 above) is not permitted. Where a PhD candidate has been permitted to re-submit for MPhil as an outcome of their first examination, they may not then be given a second or further re-submission opportunity for MPhil as an outcome of that re-submission examination.
- 28 Where a resubmission viva is required; the Director of Studies may request sight of the examiners' resubmission preliminary reports from the Graduate School to assist the candidate's preparation for the viva. The candidate themselves may not have a copy of these reports. As an examiner this will not limit your line of questioning during the viva to that only outlined in the preliminary reports.

Research Degrees Award Board

- 29 The University's Research Degrees Award Board receives recommendations from viva voce examiners for PhD, DPhil, MPhil and all professional doctorates alongside outcomes from field boards on taught modules contributing towards the credit requirement.

Key documents

- 30 UWE, Bristol [Academic Regulations](#) Volume 2 for postgraduate research programmes of study.
- UWE, Bristol [Postgraduate Research Degrees Code of Practice](#).
- UWE, Bristol Graduate School Handbook [Part 14 - final assessment](#). A guide for staff and students.

Appendices

- 1 Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology
- 2 Professional Doctorate in Education
- 3 Professional Doctorate in Health Psychology

Professional Doctorate in Biomedical Sciences (DBMS):

Requirements: 120 M level credits and a thesis with a maximum word limit of 35,000. For further information please contact the Director of Studies or the Programme Leader, Dr Ruth Morse, 0117 3282022

Appendix 1

Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology (DCP)

This is a 3-year full time or 4/5-year part time professional practice programme leading to Doctoral level qualification as a Counselling Psychologist and in order to practice are required to register as 'practitioner psychologist - counselling psychologist' with the Health and Care Professions Council and eligible to apply as Chartered Psychologist with British Psychological Society.

The students attend university for a minimum of one day per week for the taught component across their time on the programme, working consistently in clinical practice in different settings, while engaging in academic study including the thesis.

Clinical settings are broad and varied just to mention a few; forensic, low/med secure psychiatric units, secondary/tertiary care, IAPT – low and high intensity, general hospitals (physical and mental health) voluntary counselling organisations, working with wide range of client presentations - with children, adults and older adults.

All modules on the programme are compulsory and include, professional ethics, diversity, social justice, therapeutic interventions (psychodynamic, CBT and Integrative) theory and clinical practice, personal and professional development, critical psychopathology, professional issues, advanced theory, professional issues, neuropsychology, leadership, quantitative and qualitative methods and counselling psychology research.

The research thesis phase runs alongside the taught components of the programme (attainment of 270 M level credits) and follows the UWE research process via the Graduate School for professional Doctorate students; project registration, progression viva examination, progress review stage and final viva examination.

The expected word count of the thesis is approximately 40,000 words including the journal article (approximately 6,000 words, depending on the guidance for the specific journal). The word count is less than that of a traditional PhD, and one which meets Doctorate level descriptors in the context of Counselling Psychology.

Award Leader: Dr Zoe Thomas

Appendix 2

Professional Doctorate in Education (EdD).

The EdD is a part-time degree which is divided into 2 parts: part 1 is taught over the first 2 years (120 M level credits) and part 2 is the supervised research phase which can last between a minimum of 2 and a maximum of 4 years.

There are 4 compulsory modules in part 1 of 30 credits each. These are Action Research & Evaluation in Education; Researching Educational Policies & Professional Identities; Theoretical Perspectives on Teaching & Learning; Advanced Preparation for Research. No empirical research is conducted in part 1 and these modules are assessed through essays and presentations. The final modular assessment in part 1 is the preparation of a research proposal for the study which the student wishes to carry out in part 2.

In part 2 EdD students focus on producing their doctoral thesis in the same way as other doctoral students at UWE, eg. progression points and ethical approval.

The thesis is a maximum of 60,000 words which is shorter than for a PhD in education. This is due to the assessment which takes place in part 1 of the programme.

Students are encouraged to reflect in the thesis on how the research may impact on their (or others') practice.

EdD students are required to meet the University's Doctoral descriptor the same as PhD students.

Award Leaders: Dr Jane Andrews and Dr Richard Waller

Appendix 3

Professional Doctorate in Health Psychology (DHP)

The Professional Doctorate in Health Psychology at UWE is designed to provide a doctoral level education and professional qualification.

Trainees will be working full-time in an appropriate health setting, with agreed release to attend Professional Doctoral training schools and supervision meetings over a minimum three-year period.

Trainees are prepared for accreditation as a Registered Psychologist receiving training and supervised practice in the five areas of competency specified in the regulations of the British Psychological Society's (BPS) Board of Examiners in Health Psychology. On completing this course trainees are eligible to apply for the Register of Health Psychologists held by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC).

The training is organised across five 30 credit modules and involves workshops covering the five areas of professional development: research (systematic review module), teaching and training, consultancy skills, professional skills and psychological interventions. This structure coincides with the requirements of the Division of Health Psychology, Stage 2 qualification enabling Full Membership status of the BPS and also the standards of proficiency required by the Health and Care Professions Council.

Assessment is through the submission of a series of assignments on the modules in years one to three, that evidence the acquisition of skills across the following areas: systematic review, professional skills, teaching and training, consultancy skills and psychological interventions. This would've been assessed separately prior to completion of the final thesis.

The trainee finally submits a report of a major piece (thesis) of empirical doctoral level research and undergoes a viva voce. The thesis is expected to be a minimum of 20,000 words and a maximum of 35,000 words.