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**YORK
ST JOHN
UNIVERSITY**

Instructions to examiners for research degree examinations

MPhil

Doctorates (PhD, EdD, Professional)

2025-26



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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose

- 1.1.1 These instructions cover the responsibilities and duties before, during and after the candidate's oral examination.
- 1.1.2 The guidance provided here is to ensure that research degree examinations are conducted fairly and professionally, and in accordance with University regulations.
- 1.1.3 Throughout this document the term **candidate** is used to indicate a **postgraduate researcher** who is under consideration for achievement of an award.

1.2 Scope

- 1.2.1 This document covers theses submitted for examination for the following research degrees:

| Degree | Exam Format | Panel |
|-------------------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| Master of Philosophy | | |
| Doctor of Philosophy | Oral examination | Internal Examiner |
| Doctor of Education | | External Examiner(s) |
| Professional Doctorate | | Independent Chair |

- 1.2.2 The Code of Practice for Research Degrees should be referred to for specific information relating to the assessment of the following research degrees:
 - Practice-led PhD (CoP Section 15)
 - Professional Doctorates (CoP Section 16)
 - PhD by Published Work (CoP section 18)
- 1.2.3 If you have any queries about the examination process, please contact the PGR School on pgr.school@yorksj.ac.uk

1.3 Update summary

- 1.3.1 V6.1 October 2025
- 1.3.2 A record of updates is stored in **Section 10**.

2. Submission

2.1 Thesis format and structure

- 2.1.1 The thesis must be written in English¹. Details of the format and presentation requirements for theses are published in the separate 'Guide to the Examination Process for Research Degrees' (section 3).
- 2.1.2 Candidates are informed that submission of the thesis for examination must be made to the PGR School through the Research Degree Submission site on Moodle and **not be sent directly to the examiners**. Candidates are solely responsible for the decision to submit their work for examination and for the thesis which is submitted. Substitute versions of theses, additional pages or supplementary material will not be accepted after submission of the thesis and candidates are informed that these must not be sent directly to the examiners. This applies in all cases, irrespective of whether the thesis was submitted for examination on or before the maximum time limit for submission.
- 2.1.3 The thesis is provided to the examiners on the basis that they will treat the contents, and any issues relating to the candidature, as strictly confidential in the periods before, during and following the examination, until such stage as the work may be published in accordance with normal academic custom. The PGR School will be advised by the School of any specific confidentiality undertakings that are required as a result of commercial agreements and will inform the examiners accordingly. If for this, or any other reason, examiners should find that their appointment as examiner would create some conflict of interest they should contact the PGR School (pgr.school@yorksj.ac.uk) immediately.
- 2.1.4 Examiners are specifically asked to bear in mind that the thesis submitted for examination represents research that may reasonably be expected of a capable and diligent PGR after completion of the standard period of study.
- 2.1.5 The thesis will be submitted as an eThesis and made available to examiners as a PDF document. When examiners are appointed they will be asked whether they would like to receive a softbound copy of the thesis for examination purposes, in addition to the eThesis.

2.2 Thesis word limit

- 2.2.1 During their examination of a submission, examiners are asked to bear in mind that all candidates have been given the following advice regarding thesis length:

'During the examination of the thesis the examiners will be considering both the quality and value of the work and the way in which the candidate has chosen to present their review, results, arguments and conclusions. The candidate's ability to express their findings in a clear and concise manner will be under examination and excessive length or too discursive a style will be judged a weakness. The supervisor is best placed to advise on the desirable length and form of the submission within the University's limits.' [Extract from section 3.22 of the 'Guide to the Examination Process for Research Degrees'].

¹ With the exception of research degrees in the modern languages where, in certain circumstances approved by the Research Degrees Examination Panel, a thesis may be submitted in a language other than English.

2.2.2 Submissions should normally be within the following limits:

| Degree | Minimum length | Maximum length |
|-------------------------|--|---------------------------|
| MPhil | N/A | 60,000 words (200 pages) |
| MPhil Practice-led | 20,000 (60 pages) | 30,000 words (100 pages) |
| PhD | N/A | 100,000 words (300 pages) |
| PhD Practice-led | 25,000 (75 pages) | 50,000 words (150 pages) |
| Professional Doctorates | N/A | 50,000 words (150 pages) |
| Doctor of Education | N/A | 50,000 words (150 pages) |
| PhD by Published Work | Please see specific requirements in Section 2.3 below and Section 18 of the Code of Practice | |

Please note that the above limits include all appendices and footnotes but not bibliographies/reference lists.

2.2.3 Candidates are able to request an extension to the maximum limit if they consider that they cannot avoid exceeding the above limit and this request must be supported by the School. If the request is approved by RDEP, details of the case for exceeding the limit will be made available to examiners.

2.3 PhD by Published Work submission

2.3.1 A submission for PhD by Published Work should consist of:

- a) An abstract (maximum of 500 words, to fit on one page of A4).
- b) A critical review of the submitted work (minimum of 10,000 words and maximum of 20,000 words) comprising the following chapters:
 - i. Chapter 1: summarise the aims, objectives, methodology, results and conclusions covered by all the published work in the portfolio;
 - ii. Chapter 2: indicate how the published work forms a coherent body of work
 - iii. Chapter 3: indicate what contribution the candidate has made to this work
 - iv. Chapter 4: indicate how the work contributes significantly to the expansion of knowledge.
- c) The submitted portfolio of published work which must add up to a substantial and coherent body of work which would have taken the equivalent of three years of full-time study to accomplish and demonstrates how the candidate's work makes a substantial direct academic contribution to the expansion of knowledge.

2.3.2 Work included in the portfolio should already be in the public domain. Where publications are in press, appropriate evidence must be provided.

2.3.3 The structure and the format of the submission may vary and include original material and a range of media.

2.3.4 The submitted material should not have been published more than ten years prior to the date when the candidate registered for the degree.

2.3.5 Each piece of published research should be original, significant, and rigorous and there should be evidence of appropriate peer-review processes in place for each piece of published work.

2.3.6 The candidate must either be the sole author of the portfolio of published work or must be able to demonstrate in the critical review that they have made a major contribution to all of the work that has been produced by more than one author. Where co-authored works are submitted, a written statement, signed by the candidate and all of the major contributory co-authors, will be provided

specifying the candidate's individual contribution and the conditions and circumstances in which the work was carried out.

2.3.7 The examination of a PhD by Published Work should be undertaken on the basis that the submission as a whole is analogous to a thesis.

2.4 Use of jointly or solely authored publications in a thesis

2.4.1 Guidance is given to candidates on the use of their published work within a thesis, including identifying the contribution of others to the work contained within the thesis. This is especially important when chapters might have been based on jointly authored publications as the examiners will need to be able to clearly identify the work directly attributable to the candidate. This will allow them to determine whether there is an original contribution by the candidate and whether this contribution is at the appropriate level to merit the award of the degree. Examiners can view the full guidance given to candidates in the '[Guidance on the use of solely or jointly authored publications within a thesis submission](#)'.

2.4.2 When completing the 'Application for Assessment' candidates are required to indicate where they have included material in their thesis that is taken from solely or jointly authored publications. In the case of jointly authored publications candidates are required to indicate their contribution to the work and that of the other authors at the point of entry for examination, and include this information clearly on the title pages of the thesis.

2.4.3 Copies of all publications listed in the 'Application for Assessment' will be made available to examiners.

3. Before the Oral Examination

3.1 Arrangements and timescales for the examination

- 3.1.1 The PGR School is responsible for making the arrangements for examinations and will liaise with the independent chair, internal/external examiners and candidate as appropriate on the details.
- 3.1.2 Every effort should be made for the oral examination to be conducted **within three months** of the thesis submission.

3.2 Difficulties/delays/postponements to the examination

- 3.2.1 If it is not possible to meet the timescale outlined above (for example where there are other commitments of the examiners or independent chair), the PGR School will keep the candidate, supervisor and the SPGRL informed on the progress being made to arrange the examination. Where all parties are in agreement (including the candidate), a short delay can be considered by the University² and may be approved by the Research Degrees Examination Panel (RDEP).
- 3.2.2 The University will take account of known religious observances when arranging the oral examination and, as far as is possible and reasonable, accommodate the candidate's prior commitments (e.g. work commitments) and give sufficient notice of the date of the examination to allow the candidate to make appropriate leave arrangements.
- 3.2.3 A research degree award cannot be considered unless the examination process is completed. If circumstances arise which prevent a candidate from attending an oral examination they must provide a valid reason supported by documentary evidence (for example a medical note in the case of illness).
- 3.2.4 The maximum period of postponement to the oral examination that may be given to a candidate is **12 months** from the date of submission of the thesis. Cases will be considered by the RDEP.

3.3 Examination format

- 3.3.1 An oral examination will be conducted by an internal examiner and at least one external examiner. An independent 'non-examining' chair will also be appointed to ensure that the examination is conducted fairly and in accordance with University requirements. Where the candidate being assessed has been employed by the University on a fixed term or permanent contract at grade 7 or above for a combined total of twelve months or more during the candidature, two external examiners will be required.

3.4 Preliminary report form

- 3.4.1 Each examiner should read the thesis carefully and independently of the other examiner(s), bearing in mind the criteria for the award of the degree. Before the oral examination, each examiner must prepare a preliminary report and submit it to the PGR School **two weeks** in advance of the examination date. Preliminary reports must be completed independently and no discussion should take place between examiners regarding the thesis until the day of the examination. Examiners must not include any recommendation relating to the award (or not) of the degree in the report, but it is suggested that comments cover the following areas:
 - Structure and presentation of the thesis
 - Content
 - Originality

² Examiners are asked to be mindful that, particularly for overseas candidates in the UK under the Student Visa arrangements, any delay to the examination beyond the normal three-month period could be particularly problematic. The University has to adhere to strict rules regarding how long it can issue a Confirmation of Acceptance for Study (CAS) for to PGRs who have submitted for examination. Delays in arranging the examination could mean that a PGR incurs additional visa costs to cover the examination period.

- Publishable quality
- Independent critical ability of the candidate

3.4.2 If, during the reading of the thesis, the examiners suspect that research misconduct may have occurred they may recommend that the examination should not go ahead. In this instance the candidate will be informed and the process contained in the 'Research Misconduct Policy' will be followed.

3.5 Research misconduct

3.5.1 The University has procedures for the investigation of allegations of research misconduct, including plagiarism identified by examiners in a thesis submission. Where the examiners of a research degree thesis identify evidence of plagiarism within a thesis submission the process contained in the 'Research Misconduct Policy' should be followed.

3.6 External examiner fees

3.6.1 External examiners will receive the appropriate fee for the examination. Current fees payable are as follows:

| Degree | First submission | Resubmission |
|-----------|------------------|--------------|
| Doctorate | £170 | £100 |
| MPhil | £135 | £85 |

3.6.2 The fee will be paid on completion of the appropriate form after the examination.

3.6.3 If the external examiner attends an oral examination on campus, travel (and accommodation where necessary) will be booked by the University and subsistence will be reimbursed in line with the University's [Travel and Expenses policy](#).

4. Oral examination

4.1 Format of the oral examination

- 4.1.1 In addition to presenting a thesis candidates are required to present themselves for an oral examination and answer questions posed by the examiners relevant to their thesis.
- 4.1.2 The oral examination will normally be conducted as an online examination meeting for all involved parties using Microsoft Teams. However, there may be circumstances where an on-campus examination is held and those involved will be notified of this intention as soon as practicable. A hybrid arrangement split between participants being on campus and joining the examination remotely may be more appropriate in some instances. A test call can be arranged for the external examiner before the examination if they would like one.
- 4.1.3 A 'pre-examination' meeting will be arranged and this will normally take place on the day of the oral examination itself unless it has to be arranged prior to that day due to scheduling issues. This will be chaired by the independent chair and will provide examiners with the opportunity to discuss the preliminary reports. The examiners will then decide upon areas for discussion and any issues on which clarification should be sought. The 'pre-examination' meeting will define the structure of the oral examination and will identify specific topics for discussion to enable all relevant issues to be addressed appropriately.
- 4.1.4 The examiners should not discuss their provisional findings with the candidate or their supervisory team at any point before the oral examination, or give an indication of the likely recommendation until the oral examination has been completed.
- 4.1.5 The purpose of the oral examination is to ensure that the work reaches the University standards for the degree; that the work has been written by the candidate; and that the work is understood by the candidate.
- 4.1.6 All appointed examiners and the independent chair must be present for the duration of the oral examination. Those present will be the candidate, the external examiner(s), the internal examiner, the independent chair and a supervisor (as a silent observer if the candidate wishes them to be present).
- 4.1.7 The oral examination must be conducted in English.³
- 4.1.8 The University does not have specific regulations regarding the length of the oral examination or what should be discussed except that the thesis should be discussed with the candidate. The oral examination also gives the candidate the opportunity to answer questions in areas where the examiners are not satisfied. Where the evidence in the thesis is not compelling, the examiners should use the oral examination to encourage the candidate to provide convincing evidence that the stated criteria can be met. Some examiners will also wish to satisfy themselves of the candidate's general level of understanding in the subject area.
- 4.1.9 The oral examination should run continuously and be completed **within a day**, but examiners should respect any request a candidate may make for a short break. In the case of longer examinations (over two hours) or in the event that a candidate is becoming distressed a short break should be considered. If a candidate is unable to continue, the independent chair must contact the PGR School.
- 4.1.10 The structure of the examination itself may vary depending on circumstances. This could include a short presentation to the examiners at the start of the examination. The candidate should be given

³ In certain circumstances approved by the Research Degrees Examination Panel, the examination might, with the agreement of the examiners and independent chair, be conducted in a language other than English, e.g. research degrees in the modern languages or British Sign Language.

at least two weeks' notice if this is required and the arrangements must be made through the PGR School.

4.1.11 In the event that any participant has technology difficulties during an online examination they should attempt to re-join the meeting, but where it becomes impossible to continue the meeting will need to be re-scheduled.

4.1.12 The process of notifying the candidate and supervisor of the outcome of the examination should normally take place after the oral examination but, in any event, must take place **within 24 hours** of the completion of the oral examination. Please see [section 7: 'After the oral examination'](#) for further advice.

4.2 Recording of the oral examination

4.2.1 All oral examinations will be subject to audio (or video, if more appropriate) recording as specified in the '[Policy and Guidance on the Recording of Oral Examinations](#)'. The recording will cover the duration that the candidate is being examined and will not cover the discussions between examiners before or after that time. The PGR School will be responsible for the arranging the recording method and for secure storage of the recording after the examination. The independent chair will be responsible for transferring the recording to the PGR School for storage at the end of the examination.

4.3 Internal examiner

4.3.1 An internal examiner is required to have undertaken the relevant training to be on the Register of Internal Examiners. In some cases an individual may be appointed to the role by RDEP on condition that the training is completed prior to the examination taking place.

4.3.2 The role of the internal examiner is to fully participate in the academic examination of the candidate and to take the lead in advising on the University's regulations and possible outcomes of the examination. The internal examiner will also ensure that the joint examiner's report is completed and agreed with the external examiner(s) and sent to the PGR School following the examination. Where a candidate is required to carry out amendments to the thesis, the internal examiner is responsible for co-ordinating with the external examiner(s) to produce an agreed list and providing this to the candidate, **within one full working day** of the examination. If the outcome of the examination was that the degree not be awarded but the candidate is permitted to resubmit the thesis following further work the internal examiner is responsible for liaising with the external examiner(s) to produce the 'Recommendations for Resubmission'.

4.3.3 The internal examiner is responsible for reviewing the submission for potential plagiarism and will be required to confirm that this has been carried out in the Joint Examiners' Report.

4.3.4 Once a candidate has completed amendments to their thesis the internal examiner is responsible for approving the revised thesis, in consultation with the external examiner(s) if necessary. Whilst the internal examiner does not take a supervisory role during the amendments period, they may need to provide clarification of the amendments required.

4.4 External examiner

4.4.1 The role of the external examiner is to fully participate in the academic examination of the candidate and to be aware of the requirements for a research degree award under the University's regulations. As a recognised authority in the subject field of the candidate's thesis, the external examiner will be responsible for providing specific expertise on the topic concerned. The external examiner will provide input into the joint examiners' report and agree the final version in liaison with the internal examiner. In those examination outcomes which require a list of amendments or recommendations for resubmission to be provided, the external examiner will also liaise with the internal examiner to produce an agreed version.

4.4.2 Where the appointed external examiner will be undertaking their first UK research degree examination they will be provided with a briefing to ensure familiarisation of the examiner with the requirements, in addition to receiving a copy of this guidance. The briefing will be a dialogue with the opportunity for questions and will be provided by a senior, experienced internal examiner. The briefing will normally be held online via Microsoft Teams in advance of the day of the examination.

4.5 Independent chair

4.5.1 An independent chair is required to have undertaken the relevant training to be on the Register of Independent Chairs. In some cases an individual may be appointed to the role by RDEP on condition that the training is completed prior to the examination taking place.

4.5.2 The role of the independent chair is to ensure the examination process is rigorously adhered to and that the examination is conducted fairly and professionally, in accordance with University regulations. The independent chair is not expected to be an expert in the subject area, but must have good knowledge of research degree policies and procedures and have supervisory experience through to a successful completion. The independent chair is not expected to read the thesis or play a role in academic examination of the candidate or question the candidate on the work being examined at the oral examination, but is responsible for ensuring that the recording equipment is in operation for the duration of the examination.

4.5.3 After the examination the independent chair is responsible for transferring the oral recording to the PGR School, and for completing the independent chair report.

4.6 The role of the supervisor

4.6.1 A candidate may invite one of their supervisors to be 'in attendance' at their examination as an observer. A supervisor may only attend with the prior permission of the candidate. If attending as an observer, the supervisor must remain silent during the examination. They may not participate in the examination and take no part in the academic judgement and the decision making process. They must leave the examination with the candidate after the oral examination so the examiners can discuss their recommendation.

4.6.2 In cases where a candidate has more than one supervisor, only one supervisor is permitted to attend the oral examination. The independent chair is responsible for ensuring that the supervisor remains silent and that their presence at the oral examination is unobtrusive. The independent chair may ask the supervisor to leave if it is felt that their presence may jeopardise the smooth running of the oral examination.

4.6.3 Where the examination is held via Microsoft Teams the supervisor will be expected to mute their microphone and switch their camera off during the examination.

4.6.4 If not present as an observer a supervisor is required to be available for consultation whilst the examination is in process, if necessary.

5. Regulations for award

5.1 Regulations for award

5.1.1 The [Regulations for Research Degrees](#) detail the formal requirements for all of the University's research degrees. The eligibility for award of the particular research degree under examination is contained within the 'Regulations for Research Degrees'.

5.2 Learning outcomes

5.2.1 The [learning outcomes for research degrees](#) contain demonstrations of ability, transferrable skills, learning context and assessment details. Examiners will not be expected to monitor/assess all the learning outcomes at the time of the oral examination. The main emphasis of the oral examination will be upon the research achievement and it may be difficult at that stage to assess expertise in transferable subject and professional skills.

5.2.2 The ongoing process of PGR monitoring and evaluation should therefore record progress in relation to learning outcomes. The examiners may ask that the University make available these reports and records at the examination to enable them to audit the arrangements that have been made.

5.3 Differences between the publication requirements at Doctoral and Masters level

5.3.1 The following guidance is given on the publication requirements at Doctoral and Masters level:

| Level | Publication requirement |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Doctoral | <p>Publication requirement: Matter suitable for publication</p> <p>At doctoral level, the expectation is that the thesis will contain original work which is of publishable quality in appropriate, peer-reviewed journals (or publication in another form as appropriate for the field of research e.g. monograph). When discussing the extent to which the thesis contains matter suitable for publication, examiners are invited to comment on work which has already been published and/or may comment on parts of the thesis which may form the basis of an appropriate publication following some reworking.</p> |
| MPhil and Masters by Research | <p>Publication requirement: Material at a level suitable for publication</p> <p>The breadth and depth of critical analysis shown at MPhil and Masters by Research level may be more limited than that at doctoral level due to the narrower focus of the research, less extensive range of sources and shorter thesis. However, it is expected that the quality of the research demonstrated would still be at a level suitable for publication (in reputable journals or publications as appropriate to the field of research). It is expected that the work could constitute a part of a broader published work even if it does not constitute the volume of work needed for publication by itself.</p> <p>When commenting on the extent to which the thesis contains material at a level suitable for publication,</p> |

examiners are invited to comment on: work which has already been published by the candidate; parts of the thesis which could be suitable for publication following some reworking; parts of the thesis which could constitute a part of a broader published work even if it is unlikely to be published by itself.

6. Examination Outcome

6.1 Types of recommendation

6.1.1 Examiners are asked to submit **one** of the following recommendations:

- a) That the degree be awarded (without amendment).
- b) That the degree be awarded subject to amendments.
- c) That a lower degree be awarded (with or without further amendment to the thesis).
- d) That the degree is not awarded but resubmission permitted for the original or a lower award (following further work and on one occasion only).
- e) That no research degree be awarded (only possible on resubmission other than where specified under the 'Research Misconduct Policy').

6.2 Award (without amendment)

- 6.2.1 If the candidate has met the learning outcomes, the thesis satisfies the requirements for award and the thesis does not require any alterations, the examiners may recommend the award of the degree without amendments. Where this outcome is given the candidate may correct typographical errors in the thesis prior to submission of the final version in Moodle.
- 6.2.2 Where an award without amendment has been recommended for a doctoral examination, the internal examiner should ensure that due consideration has been given to whether the award should be given with recognition of research excellence (see Section 6.8).

6.3 Award subject to amendments

- 6.3.1 If the candidate has met the learning outcomes for the programme, and the thesis satisfies the requirements for the award of the degree but is found to contain errors, the examiners may recommend the award of the degree subject to amendments being made to the thesis.
- 6.3.2 Where an award subject to amendments has been recommended for a doctoral examination, the internal examiner should ensure that due consideration has been given to whether the award should be given with recognition of research excellence (see Section 6.8).
- 6.3.3 The examiners are asked to provide the details of the amendments directly to the candidate in writing **within one full working day** of the oral examination. The amendments must be completed and returned to the internal examiner by **no later than six months** from the date of oral examination.
- 6.3.4 A candidate is required to make the amendments **within six months** of the date of the oral examination (unless an extension to the amendment period has been approved by RDEP).
- 6.3.5 The examiners must provide the candidate with full details of the amendments required and the date by which they must be completed. This information will be supplied to the candidate by the internal examiner. It is the responsibility of the internal examiner to ensure that the candidate and supervisor are fully informed. The amendment period begins on the date of the oral examination so this information should be sent promptly. The internal examiner must inform the PGR School that the amendments have been completed for the award to be confirmed. There is no requirement for a further oral examination.

6.4 Lower degree to be awarded (with or without further amendment to the thesis)

- 6.4.1 If the examiners consider that the thesis does not have the potential to reach the standard to merit the intended award they may recommend that a lower degree be awarded (where regulations allow), with or without further amendment to the thesis.

6.4.2 Examiners are permitted to recommend the award of the degree of MPhil to candidates who fail to achieve the standard for the award of a PhD but who nevertheless satisfy the criteria for the award of the degree of MPhil.

6.4.3 The joint examiners' report must clearly outline the reasons for recommending the award of MPhil, giving positive examples of how the thesis meets the criteria for the award of MPhil and how the learning outcomes for MPhil award have been met. The report must also clearly outline why the criteria for PhD award had not been met. The joint examiners' report will be sent to the candidate after approval by the Research Degrees Examination Panel (RDEP) and the preliminary reports will be made available on request.

6.4.4 The thesis should be amended in accordance with section 6.3 above. If no amendments are required to the thesis before recommendation that the lower degree can be made, the candidate must submit the eThesis to Moodle **within one month** of the oral examination.

6.4.5 If the examiners believe that the candidate and the submission are potentially of PhD standard and this is the candidate's first submission, the examiners should recommend that the degree is not awarded but that resubmission is permitted.

6.5 Degree not awarded (resubmission permitted)

6.5.1 If the examiners consider that the thesis has the potential to reach the standard to merit the intended award but are concerned that it does not, at that stage, satisfy the requirements for award, they may recommend that the degree is not awarded but that the candidate is permitted to resubmit for re-examination, following further work. This recommendation may be made on one occasion only and can be for the original or a lower award. A further oral examination will usually be conducted, however, at the point of resubmission the examiners may recommend an exemption from a further oral examination.

6.5.2 The examiners are required to prepare 'Recommendations for Resubmission' (see section 6.6 below) which outline the changes required. These 'Recommendations for Resubmission' will be made available to the candidate, along with the joint examiners' report, following approval by RDEP.

6.6 Recommendations for resubmission

6.6.1 In the event that the degree is not awarded but the candidate is permitted to resubmit the thesis the examiners must prepare 'Recommendations for Resubmission', which must be typed and submitted at the same time as the joint examiners' report for consideration by RDEP within **10 working days** of the oral examination. Examiners are asked to bear in mind that it may be difficult to produce these recommendations once the examiners are no longer together and therefore it would be useful to negotiate a timetable for the production of the 'Recommendations for Resubmission'. Where it is not possible to meet this timescale the internal examiner should contact the PGR School for further advice. Good practice advice on the format and content of the 'Recommendations for Resubmission' is given in section 6.6.8.

6.6.2 The 'Recommendations for Resubmission' must be sufficiently detailed to give the candidate suitable guidance to achieve the required standard but the content should not stifle the initiative of the candidate. The examiners may choose not to include specific editorial comment in the recommendations.

6.6.3 The 'Recommendations for Resubmission' will be issued to the candidate by the PGR School after RDEP has scrutinised them together with the joint examiners' report. The candidate will be advised that the preliminary reports are available on request. The approved joint examiners' report and Recommendations for Resubmission will be issued as quickly as possible after approval by RDEP. The examiners must not issue informal 'Recommendations for Resubmission' to the candidate. If any oral advice is given before RDEP has approved the official guidance, it must be stressed to the candidate that the advice given is informal.

6.6.4 The internal examiner does not take a supervisory role during the period for resubmission but may be required to provide clarification of the 'Recommendations for Resubmission'.

6.6.5 Except in exceptional circumstances, it is usually the original examining team that will examine the resubmitted thesis.

6.6.6 A further oral examination will usually be conducted on resubmission of the thesis, however, at the point of resubmission the examiners may recommend an exemption from a further oral examination.

6.6.7 Candidates whose submission for a PhD was not awarded, but who were given permission to resubmit for a PhD may make the personal decision to resubmit their thesis for examination for the degree of MPhil.

6.6.8 Examiners may find the following good practice guidance helpful for producing the 'Recommendations for Resubmission':

- The Recommendations for Resubmission must be typed and headed 'Recommendations for Resubmission'.
- The reasons for the outcome should be explained solely in terms of why the criteria for award has not been met and should not be quantified in terms of the time the examiners feel the candidate will need to carry out changes (e.g. they will need longer than **six months**).
- The Recommendations for Resubmission must be clear and unambiguous – for example avoid including phrases like 'would benefit from', 'might like to consider' etc. Instead use language like 'the candidate must', 'the revised thesis must'.
- The use of emotive language or personal comments should be avoided.
- The Recommendations for Resubmission must be free from typographical errors.
- Remember that these are **joint** Recommendations for Resubmission – the answers should indicate it is the view of all the examiners (language like 'We feel' rather than 'I feel' should be used). A separate list of recommendations from each examiner must be avoided as it introduces the possibility of inconsistencies, contradictions and duplications. Instead one single set of clear amendments and recommendations must be provided.

6.7 No research degree awarded

6.7.1 The examiners may not recommend that the thesis be failed on a first oral examination, other than where specified under the 'Research Misconduct Policy'. Otherwise, this recommendation is only possible on resubmission and there is no further opportunity to revise and submit the work. In their report the examiners must clearly explain their reasons for not recommending the award of a degree.

6.7.2 The decision to fail a resubmission should be reached solely on academic grounds as it implies that the thesis is irredeemable or that the candidate does not possess the necessary academic abilities. It should accordingly not take any account of personal circumstances which may have a bearing on the candidate's opportunity to amend the resubmission.

6.7.3 In the event of a recommendation that a degree not be awarded examiners are asked to ensure that a thorough and detailed account of the reasons for failure is provided. The PGR School will send the joint examiners' report to the candidate after it has been approved by RDEP and they will be advised that the preliminary reports are available on request.

6.8 Research excellence recognition (doctoral submission only)

- 6.8.1 The University has a process for recognition of research excellence in doctoral research degree submissions. A recommendation of research excellence may only be made at the first submission and where the outcome is award (no amendments) or award subject to amendments.
- 6.8.2 Research excellence would be expected to reflect outstanding achievement in the thesis and oral examination at a level significantly above what would be expected for the award of a doctoral degree (highly original, high level of critical thought, outstanding presentation of the work).
- 6.8.3 Evidence of research excellence might also be identified from associated research outputs which could include: major theoretical contribution; acceptance for publication of sections in major journals; prizes for completed work; marketable software; original equipment; new therapies; major exhibitions or performances arising from the practical part of a practice-based degree.
- 6.8.4 Examiners are invited to comment on any research excellence which is identified in the submission in the Joint Examiners' Report Form and provide further information in support of this recommendation. If the recommendation is approved by RDEP the text provided by the examiners in this section will be included in a letter of congratulation sent to the candidate from the Pro Vice Chancellor (Research & International).

6.9 Process in the event of a disagreement between the examiners

- 6.9.1 In the exceptional circumstances of a failure to reach agreement on the recommendation (within the 24 hour period available⁴) the independent chair is asked to contact the PGR School immediately. RDEP will consider arrangements on a case by case basis in line with the following process.
- 6.9.2 The independent chair must advise the candidate in writing (copied to the PGR School), within 24 hours of the examination, that the examiners are unable to reach an agreement on the recommendation and that they will be submitting separate final report forms to the University.
- 6.9.3 The examiners must submit separate, independent final reports to the PGR School **within five working days** of the examination. On receipt of the reports, the PGR School will write to the candidate, supervisor(s), School Postgraduate Research Lead (SPGRL) and the original team of examiners to outline the next steps in the process (as defined below). The PGR School will also send copies of the preliminary and independent final reports to the SPGRL for information.
- 6.9.4 The examiners' final reports, along with the preliminary reports, will be considered by the RDEP. After consideration by the RDEP, the SPGRL will be asked to recommend to the RDEP, within a period of **one month**, the appointment of an adjudicator. They may consult with the supervisors as appropriate.
- 6.9.5 It is expected that the individual nominated as the adjudicator will be a senior member of staff of another UK University and a very experienced examiner of UK based research degrees. The other eligibility criteria for the appointment of external examiners will apply. A CV must be provided.
- 6.9.6 Once the nomination has been approved by the RDEP, the PGR School shall send the adjudicator:
 - A copy of the eThesis as submitted for examination.
 - The separate preliminary and final reports of the original examiners.
 - A copy of the Instructions to Examiners.
 - A blank report form template for the degree concerned.

⁴ Examiners are reminded that although the process of notifying the candidate and supervisor of the outcome of the examination will normally take place after the oral examination, it must take place within 24 hours of the oral examination. This period can be used by the examiners to discuss the recommendation and to endeavour to reach an agreement.

- 6.9.7 The adjudicator will be asked to submit a final report and recommendation to the RDEP within a period of two months. This will include the usual report form for award for the degree concerned and a covering letter outlining the reasons for the recommendation reached.
- 6.9.8 The adjudicator may interview the PGR if they deem it necessary. In such cases the independent chair who was appointed for the original examination will attend the meeting and advise on procedures. The interview will be recorded (normally audio, but video if necessary). These arrangements will be considered by the RDEP on a case by case basis.
- 6.9.9 RDEP will consider the report from the adjudicator alongside the separate reports of the original examiners. The recommendation of the adjudicator will normally be approved by RDEP (subject to any minor points of clarification under its normal procedures).
- 6.9.10 A fee amounting to twice the standard external examiner's fee will be paid to the adjudicator by the PGR School. The PGR School will be responsible for the reimbursement of reasonable expenses incurred.
- 6.9.11 The PGR School will inform the PGR, supervisor and SPGRL of the outcome. A copy of the adjudicator's final report will be provided, along with copies of the original team of examiners' reports. If a recommendation for award of the degree is made the candidate will be advised of the next steps to be taken. If an adverse academic decision is reached, the candidate will have the right to appeal under the University's appeals procedure.
- 6.9.12 The PGR School will write to the original team of examiners to inform them of the recommendation made by the adjudicator and the decision approved by RDEP.

7. After the oral examination

7.1 Notifying the candidate of the examiners' recommendation

- 7.1.1 The process of notifying the candidate and supervisor of the outcome of the examination should normally take place after the examination but must take place **within 24 hours** of the end of the oral examination. The independent chair will invite the candidate (and supervisor if present) back into the examination and advise them of the recommendation that the examiners will be making. It should be made clear to the candidate and supervisor that the result is subject to official confirmation by the Research Degrees Examination Panel.
- 7.1.2 In the event that a candidate becomes extremely distressed on receiving an adverse academic decision the independent chair is advised to contact Student Support to ensure that the appropriate support is available for the candidate. In some circumstances candidates may appeal against an adverse academic decision as specified in the [Appeals Procedure](#).

7.2 Completing the joint examiners' report

- 7.2.1 The internal examiner is responsible for ensuring that the joint examiners' report is completed in full and agreed with the external examiner(s). The internal examiner must ensure that all the examiners and the independent chair sign the recommendation sheet containing the examination outcome. The joint examiners' report should be returned to the PGR School, together with the copies of the completed preliminary reports within **two working days** of the oral examination. Where the examiners recommend that the degree is not awarded but resubmission is permitted, the Recommendations for Resubmission must also be prepared and submitted to the PGR School with the joint examiners' report within **10 working days** of the oral examination.
- 7.2.2 All sections of the report must be completed using the appropriate template for the degree under examination. The questions must be answered clearly and fully, with specific examples from the thesis included in the responses. The report must stand alone from the thesis and it must be clearly evident from reading the report itself that the thesis demonstrated the criteria necessary for the decision that was made, for example in the case of an award of a doctoral thesis, evidence of originality, independent critical ability and matter suitable for publication⁵.
- 7.2.3 The joint examiners' report should be consistent with the preliminary reports. If there were issues identified in the preliminary reports that were successfully addressed in the oral examination this should be reflected in the joint report. The responses in the joint report should indicate that it is the view of all the examiners (language like 'We feel' rather than 'I feel' should be used).
- 7.2.4 The joint examiners' report form for a resubmission must 'stand alone' from that completed after the first examination and examiners are asked to complete all sections in full, with reference to the resubmitted thesis. The use of the phrase 'as first report', for example, should be avoided.

7.3 Research Degrees Examination Panel

- 7.3.1 The Research Degrees Examination Panel (RDEP) is able to recommend the award of research degrees from the University. RDEP will consider the content of each joint examiners' report form to establish that the criteria for the award of the degree has been met and that the recommendation sent forward covers the basic points required by the University, as well as being clear and unambiguous. The membership of RDEP consists of the Pro Vice Chancellor (Research & International), five senior academics and a member of Quality and Standards Committee.
- 7.3.2 It is important that the examiners answer each section of the report forms clearly. RDEP will ask for further information if it is not satisfied that the recommendation has been clearly and sufficiently justified or if specific examples are lacking. The joint examiners' report and recommendation of the

⁵ Where the evidence in the thesis is not compelling the examiners should use the examination to encourage the student to provide convincing evidence that the stated criteria can be met and reflect on this in the report.

examiners cannot be approved until RDEP is satisfied that the additional information supplied by the examiners addresses the concerns raised with the report.

7.4 Release of the Joint Examiners' Report to the candidate

- 7.4.1 The joint examiners' report will be sent to the candidate and their supervisor(s) by the PGR School after approval by RDEP. Examiners should bear this in mind when completing the report and ensure that the content only relates to the criteria for the award and that any criticism is fair and measured.
- 7.4.2 Examiners should note that the University does not impose any restrictions on candidates as to who can see the report. The candidate may subsequently share the report with anyone, including sponsors, publishers or other interested parties. The independent, preliminary reports (completed before the oral examination) are not automatically released to the candidate but will be released on request.

7.5 Role of the internal examiner during the amendments period

- 7.5.1 In the case of a recommendation that the degree be awarded subject to amendments being made, the candidate must carry out the amendments to the satisfaction of the internal examiner **within six months** of the date of the oral examination. The internal examiner should aim to check the amendments in a reasonable timescale, preferably within a maximum of four weeks, and provide timely feedback to the candidate. The internal examiner should contact the PGR School as soon as possible if circumstances arise which may mean a delay in checking the amendments. To assist in the process of checking and approving the amendments it is strongly recommended that the candidate provides information outlining what amendments they have made. This could be in the form of tracked changes or supplied as a separate list (to be agreed between the internal examiner and the candidate). Candidates must fully correct individual pages of the thesis as it is not acceptable simply to provide an errata page.
- 7.5.2 Candidates are advised to consult with their supervisor(s) throughout this process. **The internal examiner does not take a supervisory role during the amendment period**, but they may be required to provide clarification of the amendments required. Candidates are advised to consult their supervisor in the first instance where clarification is required. Supervisors may contact internal examiners on behalf of candidates when further clarification would be helpful.

7.6 Confirming the completion of amendments to the thesis

- 7.6.1 The internal examiner must confirm to the PGR School that the candidate has completed the amendments to their satisfaction. The external examiner(s) can be consulted on the amendments carried out by the candidate if they wish. **Once the internal examiner has checked the amendments and approved the changes made they must inform the PGR School** that the amendments carried out have been satisfactorily completed. The PGR School will then advise the candidate that they may now go ahead and submit the final thesis.

7.7 Extensions to the normal amendment period

- 7.7.1 The internal examiner should contact the PGR School if any problems are experienced with the candidate completing and returning the amendments by the normal **six-month** deadline. In exceptional circumstances RDEP may consider an extension to the amendment deadline. Further advice can be found in the 'Code of Practice for Research Degrees'.

7.8 Final thesis

- 7.8.1 Once the internal examiner has confirmed that they are happy with the amendments the candidate may submit the final electronic version of their thesis and thesis deposit form to Moodle. Once the candidate's award has been confirmed by the Chair of RDEP the thesis will be made available in the [institutional repository \(RaY\)](#) as soon as possible thereafter, subject to any embargo period.

8. Examination of a resubmitted thesis

8.1 Resubmission

8.1.1 Examiners do not take a supervisory role during the period for resubmission. The internal examiner may, however, be required to provide clarification of the 'Recommendations for Resubmission'. Candidates are advised that they should consult their supervisor in the first instance where clarification is required. Supervisors are asked to contact internal examiners on behalf of candidates when further clarification is required.

8.1.2 Candidates are normally required to resubmit their thesis within the following period from the date of issue of the 'Recommendations for Resubmission'. The maximum time limits for resubmission are below, however, candidates may resubmit at any point once the amendments have been done and the thesis is ready to be re-examined.

| | |
|---|------------------|
| PhD resubmission | within 18 months |
| MPhil resubmission | within 15 months |
| PhD original submission being resubmitted for MPhil | within 12 months |

8.1.3 If circumstances arise which prevent the candidate from resubmitting their thesis within the normal period, a case for an extension to the amendment period can be submitted for consideration by RDEP. Further advice is given in 'Code of Practice for Research Degrees'.

8.2 PhD resubmission for MPhil

8.2.1 A candidate who submitted for a PhD and was not awarded a degree at the first oral examination but was given permission to resubmit the thesis for a PhD may elect to resubmit the thesis (in a suitably revised form) for examination for MPhil, under the normal examination requirements for that degree. Resubmission must take place **within 12 months** from the date the 'Recommendations for Resubmission' are issued.

8.3 Examination of a resubmitted thesis

8.3.1 Except in exceptional circumstances, it is usually the original examining team that will examine the resubmitted thesis. Each examiner must read the resubmitted thesis independently of the other examiner(s) and complete an examiner's preliminary report before discussing the resubmission with the other examiners. A further oral examination will usually be conducted, however, once they have considered the resubmission the examiners may recommend an exemption from a further oral examination. The internal and external examiners would all need to be in agreement that a further oral examination was not required and the exemption would need to be approved by RDEP.

8.3.2 Every effort should be made to complete the re-examination within six weeks of receiving the resubmitted thesis but examiners are asked to accept a maximum time scale of **three months** in which to complete the process (including a second oral examination if one is required).

8.3.3 The original examiners' report and 'Recommendations for Resubmission' (following the first oral examination) will be provided to the examiners with the resubmitted thesis. Candidates are also required to supply a summary of how the revised thesis has responded to changes detailed by the examiners in the 'Recommendations for Resubmission'. There is no set format for this and the candidate is asked to present this in a format which best reflects the changes they have made. This will also assist the examiners when considering the resubmitted thesis as particular attention will be given to the extent to which the candidate has addressed the issues raised in the 'Recommendations for Resubmission'.

8.3.4 Examiners are advised that the 'Recommendations for Resubmission' must clearly indicate the necessary and sufficient conditions which, if complied with by the candidate, and provided that the thesis as a whole is satisfactory and a second oral examination (if required) is successful, would

lead to a recommendation for the award of the degree (albeit possibly with amendments). If, on resubmission, the alterations and improvements required in the 'Recommendations for Resubmission' have been carried out to the satisfaction of the examiners, the thesis as a whole remains satisfactory and a second oral examination is successful (if carried out), a recommendation should then be made for the award of the degree.

8.3.5 It is possible that some candidates may not (for various reasons and sometimes for defendable academic reasons) have followed all the advice and guidance given in the 'Recommendations for Resubmission'. In these cases the examiners should consider the thesis as a whole and reach a decision whether or not the thesis now meets the appropriate minimum standard for the award of the degree, or whether one of the other options set out below is appropriate.

8.4 Second oral examination following resubmission

8.4.1 All examiners consider the resubmission and a further oral examination will usually be conducted, however, once they have read the resubmission the examiners may recommend an exemption from a further oral examination. Arrangements for a second oral examination will be as for the first oral examination (as outlined in section 4).

8.5 Recommendations following resubmission

8.5.1 Candidates are not permitted to present a thesis for re-examination on more than one occasion. The outcome of the second oral examination for the candidate will be either:

- a) Recommendation that the degree be awarded (subject in some cases to amendments being made to the thesis).
- b) Fail.

In the case of a resubmission for the degree of PhD, the candidate may also be recommended for the award of the degree of MPhil (subject in some cases to amendments being made to the thesis).

9. Other useful information

9.1 Support for disabled candidates

- 9.1.1 Candidates are able to access Disability and Inclusion support through the University's [Student Hub](#) and this may lead to recommendations for reasonable adjustments to the examination being identified through a Learner Adjustment Plan (LAP). Requests for such reasonable adjustments can be submitted through the Application for Assessment form and details of any agreed reasonable adjustments will be made available to the examiners and independent chair.
- 9.1.2 On the day of the examination the PGR School has responsibility for facilitating any agreed reasonable adjustments to the oral examination. This will ensure that reasonable adjustments to the oral examination are put in place so that disabled candidates are not disadvantaged by the examination process. However, the same academic standards for the award of the particular research degree must be upheld and the thesis must meet the criteria and standard expected for the qualification concerned.

9.2 'Exceptional circumstances' for candidates

- 9.2.1 For PGRs, the University accommodates 'exceptional circumstances' by considering a period of suspension or extension of study which will lengthen the overall candidature and delay the deadline for submission of the thesis for examination. Full details are contained in the 'Code of Practice for Research Degrees'.
- 9.2.2 There can be no 'exceptional circumstances' with the criteria for award. In order to be eligible for the award of the degree, all candidates must complete an oral examination and the thesis submitted for examination must meet the stated criteria for award of the degree and the specified learning outcomes must be met. Any circumstances which may have affected the candidate during their period of study should not be taken into account as part of the examination of the thesis and should not lead the examiners to award a research degree where the work is not considered to be of the appropriate standard. However such factors might be taken into account when determining whether any reasonable adjustments to the examination process should be considered, for example in the case of a disability, or in terms of what support the student may need in order to complete any amendments to the thesis after the examination.

9.3 Ethical review of the research

- 9.3.1 All candidates are required to confirm that they are aware of, and comply with, the University's procedures for the review of ethical issues arising from research. Confirmation of the candidate's awareness of the ethical implications of their research, and that ethical approval has been sought and received where necessary, is reviewed at various stages in the candidature, including the transfer stage and at entry for examination.
- 9.3.2 At the point of entry for examination, the candidate is required to confirm that all ethical review requirements have been satisfactorily addressed. The University recognises that in some cases it may be beneficial for examiners to have access to the detailed ethics information so they can see how candidates have dealt with the ethical issues of their research. The documents which make up the ethics application typically include the application form, recruitment material, participant information sheet and consent form. These documents can be combined into one PDF and made available to examiners on request. If examiners require access to this information they should contact the PGR School in the first instance. Further information about the University's research ethics policy and requirements for researchers is available at:
<https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/research/research-ethics--integrity/>.

9.4 General feedback on the examination process

9.4.1 If examiners wish to submit separate comments or provide any general comment or feedback regarding the examination process which they wish to bring to the attention of RDEP they are invited to do so in writing to the PGR School (pgr.school@yorksj.ac.uk).

9.5 Useful documents relating to research degree examinations

9.5.1 The following documents relating to the submission and examination of theses for research degrees are available:

- [Regulations for Research Degrees](#)
- [Learning Outcomes](#)
- Code of Practice for Research Degrees
- Guide to the examination process for research degrees
- [Guidance on solely and jointly authored publications in a thesis submission](#)
- [Research Misconduct Policy](#)

Forms:

- Examiners' Preliminary Report Form (First Submission)
- Examiners' Preliminary Report Form (Resubmission)
- Joint Examiners' Report and Recommendation (PhD / MPhil)
- Independent Chair Report

10. Record of updates to the Instructions

| Section | Changes made | Date approved by RDC or QSC | Notes |
|---------|---|-----------------------------|-------|
| 2.3 | Addition of section on PhD by Published Work submissions | QSC June 2023 | |
| Various | Updated terminology/links | July 2023 | |
| 4.3.3 | Additional para to state that it is part of the internal examiner's role to confirm that the submission has been checked for potential plagiarism | RDC February 2024 | |
| 6.2.2 | Additional paragraph emphasising the option of research excellence recognition | RDC February 2024 | |
| Various | Removal of reference to MA/MSc by Research oral examinations | September 2024 | |
| Various | Change in process from Registry to PGR School | September 2024 | |
| 3.1.1 | Removal of informing supervisors and PGR Leads of viva arrangements | RDC February 2025 | |
| 3.4.1 | Clarification that preliminary reports be completed independently and submitted within 2 weeks of viva date | RDC February 2025 | |
| 7.4 | Removal of reference to Progress and Award Examination Panel, awards now made by RDEP. | January 2025 | |
| Various | Updated links and terminology | August 2025 | |
| 9.1 | Access to Disability and Inclusion, and Wellbeing, support through the Student Hub | August 2025 | |