Graduate School

**POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH DEGREES - GUIDELINES FOR EXAMINERS**

**The Doctoral and MPhil criteria**

1 The Doctoral descriptor, approved by Academic Board, is as follows:

The requirements for the award of a Doctorate of the University (other than a Higher Doctorate) are stated in the UWE Bristol Doctoral Descriptor, approved by Academic Board. Under the terms of this definition, a doctorate is awarded to a candidate who:

(1) 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;

(2) can demonstrate a critical understanding of the current state of knowledge in that field of theory and/or practice;

(3) 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;

(4) can demonstrate a critical understanding of the methodology of enquiry;

(5) 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;

(6) can critically reflect on his/her work and evaluate its strengths and weaknesses, including understanding validation procedures.

2 The descriptor for the MPhil, approved by Academic Board, is as follows:

The award of a Master of Philosophy requires that a candidate should demonstrate that he/she:

(1) has engaged in enquiry which makes a contribution to knowledge within his/her field of study;

(2) can demonstrate a systematic understanding of the current state of knowledge within his/her field of theory and/or practice;

(3) 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;

(4) can demonstrate a sound understanding of the methodology and techniques of enquiry relevant to the discipline or field of study;

(5) 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;

(6) can critically reflect on his/her work and evaluate its strengths and weaknesses;

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

3 The examination process should be conducted in such a way that the examiners are able to satisfy themselves that the requirements of the relevant descriptor have been met.

**Membership of viva panels**

4 The examining panels for viva voce examinations are appointed by the Research Degrees Award Board. Panels will normally consist of one external examiner and one internal examiner, and an Independent Chair. Where the candidate is or has recently been employed by the university, a second external examiner will be appointed to the team.

5 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.

**Preliminary Reports**

6 Each examiner is required to produce an independent preliminary report using the designated form (RD10 or RD11) and submitted prior to the viva. Examiners are strongly encouraged to submit their reports at least a week or so before the scheduled viva. These reports should be prepared independently, in that the examiners should not confer in order to write their preliminary report. In preparing the report each examiner should consider the specific questions raised on the form RD10/RD11, as well as noting the key areas that should be explored in the viva. The reports should be typed and normally at least 500 words in length.

7 It is important to note that within the normal examining process preliminary reports are not shown to the candidate, but examiners must be aware that the impact of data protection legislation and of the Freedom of Information Act mean that candidates may be able to gain access to these reports.

8 Candidates are expected to provide the word count of their thesis. The University has a word count policy to guide both students and examiners (Appendix 1). The following extract provides details on the expected word limit of PGR theses:

K16.3.13 The text of the thesis should normally not exceed the following word length (excluding ancillary data):

1. 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

1. 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

**Confidentiality of thesis**

9 On occasions, it will be necessary for a thesis or part of a thesis to be examined under conditions of confidentiality and then kept on restricted access. Where this is the case external examiners will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement as part of their contract.

**Attendance at the viva**

10 Viva voce examinations are not public defences, and normally the only people who may be present are the candidate, the examiners and the Independent Chair. Members of the candidate’s supervisory team are also free to attend, provided that the candidate is happy with this. Where supervisors are intending to be present, the Independent Chair should make contact with the candidate at least 48 hours before the start of the viva to ensure that the candidate is in agreement with this.

11 Subject to the agreement of both the candidate and the Independent Chair, one additional academic may also attend in the interests of training in the skills of conducting a viva voce examination.

**Planning the viva**

12 At least one week before the viva, the Independent Chair will contact the candidate (which may be done either face to face, by telephone, or by email). The Independent Chair will ensure that the candidate understands the examination process and the possible outcomes. The Independent Chair will establish whether the candidate has applied to start the viva with a short presentation (see paragraph 18 below).

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 which of the examiners should lead the questioning on each of these.

14 In certain circumstances it may be necessary to vary the arrangements for the viva where candidates have previously alerted the University sufficiently far in advance of medical or other conditions that may impact upon their ability to undertake the viva in the usual way. The sort of adjustments that may be agreed by the Research Degrees Award Board may vary according to individual need, but may include: scheduled or ad hoc rest breaks during the viva; allowing the candidate to bring an electronic version of their thesis into the viva room; providing the candidate with an advance indication of the likely areas that the examiners will wish to explore initially, subject to the caveat that supplementary questioning may evolve in other directions. Where reasonable adjustments are proposed examiners will be asked to indicate that they agree to proceed as an examiner for that assessment.

**Location of the viva**

15 It is important that a suitable room is provided for the viva eg quiet, free from interruption and with appropriate layout of furniture, and that there are adequate supplies of refreshments, particularly water. If a presentation is to be made, the relevant audio visual facilities should be available.

16 University Academic Regulations specify that vivas will normally take place on University premises. The precise location may depend on whether there is a need for specific facilities. It may also be appropriate for the viva to be located away from University premises, either in the UK or overseas. This can be arranged, where there is good reason, subject to permission being granted by the Academic Registrar.

**Conduct of the viva**

17 The Independent Chair should start the viva, ensuring that all relevant introductions are made and that the candidate understands the roles of those present. Where a supervisor is in attendance, the Independent Chair should remind the supervisor that they may not speak, except in response to a direct question put by the Independent Chair, or by an examiner with the permission of the Independent Chair.

18 It is common in some disciplines for the candidate to make an initial presentation of the key points of the work. Presentations are expected to last no longer than 10 minutes and must not include any new material that is not already in the thesis. Students are expected to notify the Independent Chair and the Assessment Manager prior to the viva of their intention to make such a presentation. In preparing any such presentation, the candidate should address *inter alia* the following issues:

* what was the purpose or intent of the research work reported?
* how successful was the project?
* in what way do the outcomes of the project demonstrate originality?
* what were the key methodological issues?

19 The viva will then, in general, follow the agenda, although the Independent Chair will need to be aware that the direction that the discussion may take can be quite difficult to predict in advance. There must be scope for the viva process to be fairly open-ended, and to follow interesting lines of debate as these occur. The Independent Chair should, however, ensure that the debate remains focused on the candidate’s work.

20 The Independent Chair should ensure that before the completion of the viva voce examination the candidate has an opportunity to make any points which they feel have not been appropriately covered.

**Outcome of the examination**

21 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. The following paragraphs give guidance on the nature of the decisions available to the examiners. 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.

22 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:

1. Without correction or amendment;
2. 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;
3. 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 weeksPT. Amendments to be approved by one or both/all examiners;
4. 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.
5. **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.

1. **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.

1. **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 material refers to the critical commentary element of the submission.

23 An outcome of `award subject to **corrections’ (A.ii**. above) will be of typographical/presentational errors only.

24 An outcome of an `award subject to **minor amendments’ (A.iii.** above) is normally restricted to amendment of representational errors or re-presenting and restructuring existing text only; new work should not normally be required.

25 An outcome of an `award subject to **major amendments’ (A.iv**. above), indicates that the candidate meets the award criteria but the presentation of the material submitted does not reflect the quality of the research undertaken and requires some additional work. This outcome may include a measure of new work including limited extra research or analysis, undertaking some new experiments or repeating existing ones, or re-writing sections of material. This however, should not amount to a significant extension or fundamental change in direction of the original research, and will not involve a complete re-write of the material as a whole.

26 If the corrections or amendments required are mainly matters of presentation, then it will be appropriate for the corrections/minor amendments to be approved by the internal examiner only. Where the deficiencies in the thesis are more ones of substance resulting in an outcome recommendation of “major amendments”, then the corrections or amendments should be checked by both external and internal examiners.

27 Referred for **resubmission and re-examination (Outcome at B.** above) indicates that the candidate does not currently meet the relevant award criteria but with substantial new work and re-writing of the material the examiners judge that they have the potential to do so at re-examination. Revision of the material may relate to theoretical and/or methodological aspects and new work may include any or all of the following: new research and/or new data, fieldwork or practice, new analysis, substantial new literature.

28 Very exceptionally the examiners may recommend that the candidate be re-examined by viva only without having to resubmit revised material, Please note however that this variant is almost never used and might be appropriate only where the candidate’s submitted work meets the award criteria, but performance at viva was so poor or disjointed that the examiners were unable to establish to their satisfaction the candidate’s understanding of their submitted research.

29 It is important to note that a candidate who is referred for resubmission and re-examination with or without a further viva will only be exempt from an additional viva where the examiners unanimously agree **after re-examining the resubmitted thesis** that the degree can be awarded. However, a candidate may not be failed outright at resubmission and the degree not awarded without the opportunity to undergo a further viva.

30 In determining the recommended outcome, examiners need to bear in mind that outcomes **A. i – iv. are pass outcomes**, albeit subject to corrections or amendments being made. whereas outcome **B is a referral**.

31 Examiners will also sometimes need to consider the possibility of recommending that the work be re-presented for the award of MPhil for candidates who have submitted work for a PhD/DPhil award.

32 Where the view of the examiners about a PhD/DPhil submission (not applicable for Prof Docs) is that it falls short of the standard for a PhD/DPhil outcome, and that the candidate is unlikely to be able to bring the work to the required standard by resubmission, then the examiners should separately consider whether the work, when judged against the specific descriptor for the MPhil award, meets the required standard. Where this is the case, the examiners may recommend the award of MPhil, outcome either following amendment of the material to their satisfaction (outcome C. i.) above, or revision and resubmission of the material for examination for MPhil (outcome C. ii). It should be noted in this context that the standard of presentation is not lower for the MPhil, and the award of MPhil cannot be justified in the case where the deficiencies against the PhD/DPhil requirement are ones of presentation. The most significant difference between the PhD and the MPhil is one of depth and sophistication and hence for example the MPhil does not make the same demand of an original contribution to the knowledge base within the discipline. **Thus the outcome at C. ii. will always require examination of the re-submitted material** as a whole by all the examiners and will require a viva.

33 Where the examiners cannot see evidence that any material progress towards meeting the relevant award descriptor has been made in the conduct of the work, then the appropriate outcome will be not to award the degree (**outcome D above). NB. This is a fail outcome.**

**Reporting the outcome (recommendation) of the viva**

34 When the outcome is either A. ii., iii., iv. or outcome B the examiners must provide sufficient information on what is required of the candidate to allow the Independent Chair to collate the 'Required Changes and Feedback' report setting out the requirements to be met either in the form of the corrections, minor or major amendments, or for a resubmitted thesis. The Independent Chair will co-ordinate the production of the 'Required Changes and Feedback' and agree it with the examiners, before it is considered by the University’s Research Degrees Award Board (RDAB). Examiners should note that information contained within this report will be passed to the candidate.

35 Upon approval of the recommendation by the Award Board, the PGR Assessment Manager will send the requirements to the candidate no later than 5 working days after the Research Degrees Award Board. If examiners wish any specific comments contained within their pre-viva preliminary report to be made available to the candidate post-viva they must indicate this clearly to the Independent Chair so that they can include it in the 'Required Changes and Feedback' to the candidate; it will not otherwise be made available to the candidate

36 On receipt of the 'Required Changes and Feedback', the candidate must inform the Independent Chair within 21 days of any points within it which are not clear, or where the candidate feels further information is required. The period specified for making corrections, amendments or for resubmission shall start on the day the report is sent to the candidate.

37 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. For the sake of convenience annotations noted on an examiner’s copy of the thesis indicating minor presentational/typographical errors of this nature only may be passed to the candidate, but this must be noted at the appropriate point on the ‘Required Changes and Feedback’ report. An annotated thesis can only be provided in this way in conjunction with the written ‘Required Changes and Feedback’ not as a substitute for it.

38 In addition, examiners may sometimes want to make suggestions or provide general guidance to the candidate about ways in which the thesis might be improved for publication purposes, but these are suggestions only and the candidate will not be assessed or reassessed on these. These suggestions should be included in the 'feedback' section of the `Required Changes and Feedback’ form.

**Outcome of the examination - MPhil**

39 Where the examination is of a thesis submitted specifically for the award of MPhil, the examiners shall also follow the procedures set out in the paragraphs above.

**Examining the professional doctorate**

40 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 a recommendations from a professional doctorate viva.

41 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; 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).

Please refer to appendices at the end of this document for notes on the following Professional Doctorates: Doctor of Counselling Psychology, Doctor of Education and Doctor of Health Psychology.

Other Professional Doctorates available at UWE where no further information for examiners is currently available: Doctor of Biomedical Sciences, Doctor of the Built Environment, Doctor of Business Administration, Doctor of Health and Social Care.

**Examining the DPhil Award**

42 The doctoral descriptor applies to the DPhil and forms the basis for the assessment of the award.

43 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, not exceeding 20,000 words (but in some cases significantly less), on the work.

44 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 level achievement. 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.

45 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.

**Outcome of the re-examination following resubmission**

46 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 section 22 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.

**Research Degrees Award Board**

47 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**

48 UWE Bristol Regulatory Framework Academic Regulations Volume 2 – Postgraduate Research programmes of study.

The UWE Bristol Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Degrees

Available on the UWE Bristol website:

<http://www1.uwe.ac.uk/research/postgraduateresearchstudy/studysupport/regulations.aspx>

Appendix 1

**Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology**

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 Charted 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 and follow 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.

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 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.

Appendix 3

**Professional Doctorate in Health Psychology**

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. The trainee finally submits a report of a major piece of empirical doctoral level research and undergoes a viva voce.