

Regulations for Postgraduate Research Degrees

Maynooth University Graduate Studies Office

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1. Principles

Regulations for Postgraduate Degrees by Research document relates to research degrees at Maynooth University. The purpose of the regulations is to safeguard the academic standard of the university as well as the interests of students. These regulations are guided by the Irish Universities Quality Board's 'Good Practice in the Organisation of PhD Programmes in Irish Higher Education', 2nd edition (2009); the 'Irish Universities' PhD Graduates Skills' statement (2014); and the Irish Universities' definition of a structured PhD as approved by the Irish Universities Association (2009).

All postgraduate research students at Maynooth University register on structured programmes, at both level 9 (master) and level 10 (PhD) of the National Framework of Qualifications.

Research students' rights and responsibilities are governed by MU policies as published on the university website. Research students are also required to comply with all departmental policies and procedures, typically outlined in a departmental research students' handbook.

Specific responsibilities of research students include the following:

- To advance the progress and complete her/his research study;
- To maintain a professional relationship at all times with the supervising academic members and other university staff;
- To follow the plan of study and research as agreed with the supervisor, and to maintain regular contact with the supervisor;
- To document the progress of work as agreed with the supervisor and present written or other material as requested and on time;
- To inform the supervisor of any proposal to publish or make a presentation in connection with the work;
- To inform the supervisor promptly of any impediment to their work;
- To notify the supervisor of his/her intention to submit at least three months prior to the proposed date of submission; and
- To take the initiative in identifying problems and seeking solutions to them.

The core of a postgraduate research programme is the advancement of knowledge through original research, and the statement of that advancement is the thesis (doctoral or master's). The goal of a structured programme is to provide a high-quality research experience and output, with integrated support for professional development.

It is desirable for research students to have a broad mastery of their disciplinary area and to be capable of developing and managing their careers across a broad range of employment sectors. To achieve this, Maynooth University aims to provide structured support for all students, incorporating training in research methodologies and transferrable skills development opportunities, enabling our students to make the best possible progress in their studies.

Research students and their supervisors are encouraged to identify and make full use of appropriate educational opportunities to supplement the research on their chosen topic in advanced discipline specific courses, as well as in transferrable skills training. In addition to modules available within structured postgraduate research programmes at MU, research students can add courses available externally into their personalised structured programme as is best suited to their needs and career goals.

These regulations are subject to change. In any given academic session, a student is subject to the regulations that are in place at the beginning of that academic session.

2. Doctoral awards

The doctoral degree is one of the highest academic qualifications awarded by the university and is at Level 10 on the National Framework of Qualifications. It is awarded without classification to successful students on the strength of a body of original work of scholarship prepared and presented in accordance with internationally accepted academic standards. All students for doctoral degrees will be examined in the same manner through external and internal examination of the submitted thesis followed by a viva voce examination.

The PhD may vary in model (e.g., PhD by publication) and in format of submission (e.g., a musical composition). However, the same academic standards apply in all cases.

Successful completion and examination of the research thesis is the basis for the award of the PhD degree.

3. Structured PhD programmes

Departments and research institutes have developed their unique programme with a portfolio of modules and a minimum/maximum amount of credits to be earned. Full details on each programme are available at: <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/study-maynooth/postgraduate-studies/phd-research-programmes>

To support the original research activity of individual students, a personalised integrated programme of education, training, and personal and professional development activities is agreed between the student and his/her supervisor(s), within the framework of the relevant departmental structured research programme. This agreed programme is recorded in a document called the “initial meeting record”, which serves as point of reference for the duration of the research programme and for formal annual progress monitoring.

The department will produce a departmental graduate handbook and will make it available to all students. The handbook should contain details on requirements and procedures relating to all graduate matters administered at departmental level and may include:

- Information about facilities and resources available to research students within the department and within the university, including the library, computing, technical and laboratory facilities;
- A brief biography of academics and their research interests including most recent publications and successful grant areas of research;
- Departmental policy on the timing and mode of presentation of reports, reviews, seminars and examinations by which the student is assessed;
- Departmental policy on Progress Evaluation, including course requirements if applicable;
- Departmental requirements regarding demonstration, teaching and tutorials by graduate students;

- Departmental guidelines on good research practice, research conduct and research ethics within their disciplines taking into account university policies;
- Departmental policy regarding interlibrary loans;
- Department policy on student costs for attendance at conferences;
- Departmental calendar (seminar dates etc.);
- Departmental guidelines regarding thesis content and standards expected;
- Departmental specifications for the publishing of papers in international journals or international conference presentations;
- Procedures by which the student or the Supervisor may make representations as appropriate if significant difficulties arise (grievance procedures);
- Requirements for student training in health and safety issues applicable in the department.
- The department should seek to ensure that mechanisms are in place to promote regular contact between academics, support staff and graduate students, such as orientation programmes, departmental seminars, departmental workshops in safety procedures as required and similar.

3.1. Subject-specific modules

Subject-specific modules involve advanced specialist doctoral level courses provided by a department/research institute or other 4th level institutions. Subject specific modules also include master's level taught modules in the discipline area or in a cognate discipline area. Students must take a minimum of 15 credits in subject-specific modules.

3.2. Transferable skills modules

Transferable modules include modules offered in disciplines other than primary research areas that would enhance the student's skills development. These modules are designed to assist the student to develop and manage their research and future careers across a broad range of employment sectors, including academia.

Students must take a minimum of 15 credits in transferable modules.

If a transferrable skills module is not part of the departmental programme, students wishing to register for the module must have the support of their supervisor(s). Students must complete the [Form for registering for transferable modules](#) and forward it to Registry (Student Records Office).

3.3 Inter-University and external modules

A range of inter-university modules and external modules are available for research students. These are usually subject specific modules. Details of the specific registration process should be sought from the module/programme coordinator, where the particular module is being taught.

In the case of the student undertaking an external module as part of their departmental structured programme: when the module is completed, the student should bring the transcript to their Maynooth University module/programme co-ordinator for processing.

In the case where the module is not listed as part of the departmental structured programme, the student must seek the approval of the supervisor(s) before attending such a module. After completing a module, the student should complete the [Gain Accreditation for Inter-Institutional Modules](#) form and forward it together with the results to Registry (Student Records Office) for processing.

3.4 Credits required

Students who have a four-year undergraduate degree or a three-year undergraduate degree plus a masters are required to earn at least 30 credits. Individual structured PhD programmes can specify higher minimum requirements. Students can earn additional credits up to a maximum of 90 credits. Subject-specific modules must make up 15 credits and transferable modules must make up 15 credits.

Students entering the Faculty of Arts, Philosophy and Celtic Studies and the Faculty of Social Science, who have completed a three year undergraduate programme, are required to earn a minimum of 60 credits, with at least 15 credits in subject specific modules and 15 credits in transferable modules, up to a maximum of 90 credits.

3.5 Induction

The purpose of the induction programme is to promote awareness of applicable regulation and various aspects of research degrees, including but not limited to students' rights and responsibilities, rights and responsibilities of supervisors, performance monitoring, research integrity, plagiarism, ethical considerations, potential intellectual property issues, procedures and supports available within the university.

Induction programmes are held in September and January.

Postgraduate research students are required to attend the induction programme in the first year of their registration.

3.6 Credit waivers and course variations

Credit waivers may be granted on the basis of prior learning or where the student's prior certified or experiential learning is such that they would not benefit from taking the compulsory 15 credits in either transferable or subject-specific modules. Alternatively, the split between subject specific and transferrable skills modules can be altered (course variation).

Credit waivers and course variations should be sought in justified cases only. Especially in relation to credit waivers students are encouraged to take advantage of the flexibility of structured PhD programmes to maximise benefits of their postgraduate studies rather than seeking waivers.

Where the student agrees with their supervisor that a credit waiver or course variation is appropriate in their circumstances, the student will complete the [Credits Waivers/Course Variations Form](#) and present it to their departmental research student progress committee (DRSPC) for consideration and approval. If the request is approved, the fully signed form and the student's initial meeting record should be forwarded to the Dean of Graduate Studies for ratification.

4. Entry requirements

4.1 *Standard entrants*

To be eligible to enter a course of study and research for the degree of PhD in the university, an applicant must have reached a high honours standard in their primary degree (normally an overall 2.1 honours award at bachelors or masters level), or present other evidence that satisfies the head of department and the relevant faculty of his/her suitability.

4.2 *Non-standard entrants*

Applicants not meeting the above specified requirements may be deemed admissible as non-standard applicants. A case can be made that the applicant's academic qualifications should be considered as the basis for admission. Applicants can also be deemed admissible on the basis of recognition of prior experiential learning (RPEL). In such cases, applicants must submit the relevant form for consideration by the Registrar's Office well in advance of the commencement of their programme.

4.3 *International entrants*

The Maynooth University International Office (IO) reviews applications from all non-EU applicants. A report on the academic evaluation and English language competency is included in the student's application on Postgraduate Application Centre (PAC). International students can only be given an offer when the IO has reviewed the application. If the IO does not recommend making an offer, an applicant cannot be accepted. Students requiring visas should be accepted by end of July to enable visa application and to allow the IO sufficient time to write offer letters for immigration purposes. A department cannot supply this letter. Note that the IO is not notified regarding the immigration status of students, rather the student is notified directly.

4.4 *English language competency requirements (for non-native speakers of the English language)*

All applicants who are non-native speakers of the English language must provide written evidence of competency in the English language in line with the applicable MU requirements. The relevant documentation should be uploaded/forwarded to PAC.

English language requirements are set by the IO and are published on IO's website. Should an applicant not satisfy the requirements, he/she should be directed to the IO for advice.

5. Application, selection and admission procedures

Prior to submitting a formal application for admission into a postgraduate research programme, a student must consult with the appropriate department/research institute and ascertain whether or not the department/research institute would accept his/her application. The selection and admission process are undertaken at departmental level.

The department will put in place proper selection and admission procedures, which should seek to ensure that:

- The student is suitably qualified for admission for the proposed degree;
- The proposed research project is appropriate for the degree;
- The department is the most appropriate in which to conduct the proposed research

- The proposed research project is feasible in terms of time, departmental resources (staff, facilities etc.) for the expected duration of the research project.

All students, including non-standard/RPEL entrants, must formally apply for admission online via the PAC which is then used for communication with applicants regarding their application. Selection and admission process are decentralised and takes place at departmental level. Formal offers of places are made via PAC. Prospective students must accept an offer of a place at least 24 hours in advance of registration.

6. Research student registration

MU operates two standard registration times for research students, in September and January. Student fees are applied for the entire semester in which the first registration occurs. Research students are encouraged to avail of the standard registration times.

If a standard September/January registration is not possible, in particular where another registration date is stipulated by terms and conditions of external funding, students will be permitted to register outside of standard registration times.

Students register on either a full-time or part-time basis.

All students are required to re-register on annual basis in September. Students who register in January or outside of standard registration times must re-register in the following September. Deadlines for registration apply and students who fail to re-register by the relevant deadline will be subject to a late registration penalty.

All registrations are subject to payment of the applicable fees and satisfactory progress.

Research students' registration consists of (i) registration for the programme (whereby they become the university's registered research students) and (ii) registration for modules to be taken in the relevant semester. At the beginning of the academic year, the two types of registration can be completed at the same time or separately; registration for modules can only be completed after a student is registered for the programme for the given academic year. If modules to be taken in a student's first semester are agreed before the student's registration date as provided by the Registry, such student can register for modules at the time of their registration for the programme. Often however modules to be taken will only be agreed during the initial meeting which would take place after the student's first registration for the programme. In such cases the student must register on the day indicated by Registry (records office) for the programme only and will register for modules as soon as possible after the initial meeting takes place and the student's initial meeting record is produced. Research students need to familiarise themselves with the mode of delivery and timetable for their selected modules and ensure timely registration for modules.

A student who is registered for and pursuing a research master's degree may petition to transfer to the PhD register. The student must submit the transfer request along with the signatures of the supervisor and the Departmental Research Student Progress Committee for approval by the Dean of Graduate Studies. All approvals will be noted by the Graduate Education Committee.

7. Period of time for completion

Normal, minimum and maximum duration for postgraduate research programmes are as follows:

	Normal duration	Minimum duration with approval from head of dept.	Minimum duration with approval from Academic Council	Maximum duration
PhD full time	4	3	2	6
PhD part time	6	4.5	3	9
Research master's full time	2	1	1	3
Research master's part time	3	2	2	5

Students may be granted an extension beyond the above specified maximum period with the permission of their head of department and also the Registrar or Dean of Graduate Studies. Before applying for an extension, students should discuss the matter with their supervisor. The relevant form is available on the university website. If the thesis is not submitted for examination within the extended time period, students will be required to apply for a further registration extension and pay the associated fee.

An academic extension does not create a corresponding extension to any scholarship funding that students might be in receipt of. Students must approach the relevant funding body directly in relation to possible extensions of their funding.

7.1. Full-time registration

The normal duration of a PhD degree is four years of full-time study. Where a student completes the degree early, the head of department, in conjunction with the supervisor, may approve an early submission after three years of full-time study.

In exceptional circumstances, Academic Council may approve submission in a period shorter than three years of full-time study, but no less than two years. In such cases, the student will be required to pay the full-time fee for the minimum three-year period. After three years, a student may be permitted to progress one semester at a time, so that a student who submits in three-and-a-half years is liable for three-and-a-half years of fees.

After the normal period of registration (four years), the fee is normally adjusted to a reduced continuation fee equivalent to the part-time fee.

7.2. Part-time registration

Part-time status for students wishing to undertake a PhD may be granted on the recommendation of their head of department.

For part time students, the normal duration of the degree is six years. Where a student completes the degree early, the head of department, in conjunction with the supervisor, may approve an early submission after 4.5 years of part-time study.

In exceptional circumstances, Academic Council may approve submission in a period shorter than 4.5 years part time study, but no less than three years. In such cases the student will be required to pay the part-time fees for the minimum 4.5 year period.

After 4.5 years, a student may be permitted to progress one semester at a time.

7.3. Transferring from full-time to part-time registration and vice versa

A student may transfer from full time to part time and vice versa, where this reflects a genuine change in the time devoted to the research. Where a student has a combination of full-time and part-time registration, the minimum period is calculated on the basis that one-year part time is equal to two-thirds of a year full time. Students must pay the equivalent of three years full-time fees.

To transfer from full to part time, or part time to full time, the head of department should request a transfer from full time to part time (or vice-versa) in writing to the Student Records and Registration Office.

8. Supervision of research students

Each research student will have a suitably qualified lead supervisor whose responsibility will be to supervise the student on a regular and frequent basis. A supervisory team composed of MU academic staff members should be established where practicable. However alternative supervisory arrangements are also possible.

Supervision should be available to students during normal office hours. Heads of departments are responsible for ensuring that alternative supervisory arrangements are made if the need arises, e.g. when a supervisor is on leave of absence or where a change in research direction occurs.

8.1 Supervisory arrangements

The head of department should ensure that supervisors do not advise a greater number of graduate students than would compromise the quality of advice to any student, or have a negative impact on the supervisor's other duties (undergraduate, graduate, administrative) within the department.

8.1.1. Supervision arrangements within a department

Sole supervisor

The student will work with one supervisor within the department.

Co-supervision

Co-supervision involves two equal supervisors within a department who work with the student via individual and joint meetings and correspondence, ensuring that decisions on the direction, scope and quality of the research are agreed and coherently supported. In the case of co-supervision, one of the supervisors will take the lead in managing the administrative arrangements for the student and this role will be clarified with the student before registration by the relevant department.

Supervision by a primary and secondary supervisor

The primary supervisor has the main responsibility. The secondary supervisor has a clearly-defined role, usually related to an important aspect of the research. The secondary supervisor advises the student in relation to the defined aspect of the research and liaises with both student and primary supervisor. Normally a joint meeting involving primary and secondary supervisor together with the student will be convened once per semester.

Supervision by a supervisory team

A supervisory team comprises more than two supervisors. Team members may have expertise in different aspects of the research. One member of the team should be designated to take overall responsibility for the supervision of the work.

8.1.2. Joint supervision across departments in Maynooth University

This section relates to co-supervision/supervisory teams involved in equal supervision of a student. The student must apply on-line to a single department. Prior to accepting the student, the supervision partners will consult each other and come to an agreed arrangement. It is crucial that supervisory arrangements have been agreed with the relevant heads and/or directors and the proposed supervisors prior to student registration. The students must be fully informed and must be in agreement with the arrangements.

Following registration, the department to which the application was made must notify the Records Office of the joint supervision arrangements. Joint supervision is recorded on the student record system which allows the student to register for modules within both departments/institutes.

Where it is appropriate for a student to be supervised by a team comprised of members of more than one academic department or institute, there shall be due co-operation between the departments involved and the following requirements apply:

- a) One department should be designated as the administrative lead. The administrative lead will be responsible for the reporting of progress and coordination of submission and assessment;
- b) The supervisory team should work together to review progress and decide on progression;
- c) The progress should be reported to both (or all) the academic units involved.

In the event of a disagreement between departments which cannot be resolved by the heads of department, the matter should be referred to the Dean of Graduate Studies.

8.1.3. External co-supervisors

In justified cases, typically in the case of research projects involving cooperation with another academic institution, an external co-supervisor can be appointed.

The external co-supervisor is expected to:

- Agree the scope and frequency of involvement in the supervision with the student and the lead supervisor;
- Keep written records of supervision and to copy these to the lead supervisor;
- Discuss the progress with the lead supervisor at least annually.

Where an external co-supervisor is appointed, the internal supervisor is required to:

- Fulfil the roles and duties outlined in the roles and responsibilities of the supervisor;
- Ensure that the external supervisor is carrying out her/his responsibilities to the student and to the university; this includes contributing to progress monitoring reports and ensuring that they are presented at the required time;
- Meet the student with the external supervisor to discuss the research project at least once a year.

The student will work under the general direction of the internal supervisor whether the research is being carried out at the university or elsewhere.

Conditions of appointments must be agreed in advance. Normally, no payment will be made to the external supervisor. The head of department submits the relevant form to faculty for approval of the appointment.

8.2. *Criteria for supervision*

Generally, supervisors are permanent academic members of staff.

Supervisors are expected to be appropriately qualified, sufficiently expert and interested in the research area to offer the student proper advice.

A supervisor should normally hold a PhD, or have previous experience of supervision of doctoral research, or have equivalent expertise.

Supervisors who have not previously supervised doctoral research to successful completion of a degree are normally expected to participate in training and co-supervise with an experienced supervisor, where feasible.

Full-time temporary academic staff (with at least a three-year contact), qualified to PhD level and suitably experienced, may undertake supervision of PhD or research master's students with the approval of the head of department. The granting of approval will be reported to the registrar, who will notify Academic Council. The head of department must also provide the name of a member of permanent academic staff as secondary supervisor, and thus ensure that the department is able to provide alternative supervisory arrangements. These regulations apply only to lecturing staff appointed on three-year contracts and not to staff who have completed three or more years on multiple contracts of shorter duration. Students should be informed of the status of temporary academic staff before commencement of their registration.

8.3. *Supervisor's responsibilities*

The supervisor should be familiar with and seek to ensure that the student is familiar with the applicable university policies.

Whenever possible prior to enrolment, the supervisor should discuss with the student the nature of the research and the standards appropriate for the degree and negotiate an agreed research topic. A topic must be chosen which enables research embodying new knowledge at a level appropriate to the degree to be completed in the specified time. The experience of the supervisor is an essential element in choosing the topic and it is the supervisor's responsibility to ensure that the topic is appropriate.

Where a change in research direction occurs during the course of the PhD, the supervisor should recommend appropriate graduate supervisory adjustments to the head of department and departmental supervisory committee.

The supervisor should give guidance about the nature of research and the standard expected, about the planning of the research programme and presentation of a research proposal, about literature research and appropriate courses to attend.

The supervisor should ensure that accurate information regarding his/her own research and professional/administrative leave, any retirement plans and contract duration throughout period of the student's project is given to the student. If a supervisor plans to be on leave for a period greater than one month, the supervisor, in consultation with the head of department, should seek to ensure that adequate supervisory arrangements are made and that the student is given advanced notice.

Throughout the course of the PhD, the supervisor should:

- Maintain contact through regular supervisory meetings with the student; request regular written work or results of research to date and provide constructive evaluation and feedback in a reasonable time;
- Ensure that progress of the student is formally evaluated as applicable;
- Seek to ensure that the work reported in the dissertation is the student's own;
- Bring to the student's attention perceived lack of progress and any issues without delay and encourage the student to rectify deficiencies/solve issues in a timely manner. If the supervisor feels obliged to recommend a student's studies be discontinued because of unsatisfactory progress, he/she must make this recommendation to the head of department/DRSPC who will inform the student accordingly;
- Encourage the publication of the results of the research where appropriate, provided that any relevant published work is coherently incorporated into the thesis;
- Assist and advise on career path and professional opportunities;
- Facilitate the student meeting other researchers and encourage attendance at research seminars, meetings or conferences as appropriate;
- Seek to ensure that the student is aware of all relevant funding opportunities open to him/her and actively encourage the student to apply;
- Complete the annual progress report and participate in formal annual progress reviews undertaken by the DRSPC where required;
- Ensure that the student has either registered for the current academic year, has submitted their thesis for examination, has agreed suspension of registration, or has formally withdrawn from studies.

Close to completion of studies, the supervisor should advise on the form of thesis presentation, its examination, agree the nomination of external examiner(s) with the head of department, and where applicable oversee corrections and revisions following the examination.

The supervisor should be available for consultation with the examiners prior to the examination.

8.4. Initial meeting and Initial meeting record

As soon as possible after registration, the student should hold the initial meeting with his/her supervisor(s) / supervisory team. The purpose of the initial meeting is to identify modules that will enhance the student's research programme, to agree a calendar of meetings, and to ensure that the student is aware and agrees to the university regulations.

Details of the agreed programme are recorded in the initial meeting record (IMR) which is approved by the departmental research student progress committee (DRSPC). The IMR is forwarded by the DRSPC to the Graduate Studies Office (GSO) by the end of October/February, or within four weeks after first registration for students registering outside of standard registration times, for inclusion in the student record system. The IMR informs the annual progress review subsequently carried out by the student's DRSPC.

9. Assessment and progression

A student's progress is monitored continuously by their supervisor(s) and formally evaluated on an annual basis by the Departmental research student progress committee (DRSPC).

DRSPC's decisions regarding progression of postgraduate research students are ratified by the relevant examination board.

Continued registration for a research degree is subject to successful progress. Progression must be recorded on a student's record in order for the student to be able to register for the following year.

9.1. Departmental research student progress committee

The DRSPC is responsible for assessing the academic progress of a student through their research programme. It should therefore have the experience and disciplinary expertise to conduct the assessment.

A DRSPC will normally comprise three members of academic staff of the university. Where a research programme spans multiple departments and/or institutions, the DRSPC may include academic staff from participating departments/institutions. In the case of larger/smaller departments, alternative arrangements may be made depending on particular circumstances.

Departments may choose to adopt the same committee membership for all students within the department or to individualise the committee per student. Any member of the committee, whose students are under consideration, should not take part in the progress discussions involving those students.

The objectives of the DRSPC are to monitor the student's academic progress and to provide a mechanism for identification and resolution of any problems that emerge in relation to a student's progress.

9.2. Annual progress review

DRSPCs undertake formal annual progress reviews of all PhD students. The purpose of the annual review is to:

- Assess progression and grant permission to progress based on an assessment of the quality of research output to date;
- Give students the opportunity to indicate their satisfaction or lack thereof with their supervisory arrangements;
- Discuss and record any changes to the student's individualised programme;
- Ensure that students have passed their required modules before thesis submission and, where appropriate, that waivers have been ratified by the DRSPC.

In exceptional cases, at the request of the supervisor or the student, the DRSPC may meet during the academic year if a student is identified as being unable to make progress or if concerns have arisen during the year.

Substantive Review for PhD Students

(Compulsory for students who commenced their programme from 2019/20)

- Transfer from the initial phase of the PhD programme to the latter phase takes place following the substantive review.
- The substantive review is ordinarily conducted by the DRSPC and normally takes place by the end of Year Two for full-time students, and by the end of Year Three for part-time students. It is also possible to delay the substantive review once for a further year.
- Following this further year, the student should progress to the latter stages of the PhD programme, transfer to a research master's degree or exit the programme.
- Prior to the substantive review, the result code "Progress on PhD Track" is used by the DRSPC at the annual review to indicate the successful progression of the student.
- The award of the result code "Progress on PhD" following the substantive review marks the transfer of the student to the latter phase of the PhD programme, and indicates that the DRSPC deems that the project is of sufficient quality and scope for continuation on the PhD programme. The result code of 'Progress on PhD' is used following all subsequent substantive reviews where the student is deemed to have progressed satisfactorily to the next year of the programme.

9.3. Formal Assessment for PhD students

9.3.1. Aim of Yearly Assessment

Best practice advises that departments clearly communicate appropriate milestones to PhD students in advance of annual progression meetings.

First Year Annual Progress Review

The first-year annual progress review (which takes place approximately nine months after initial registration) allows the DRSPC to monitor the student's initial progress and provides a mechanism for identifying and resolving problems early in the process.

Second Year Annual Progress Review

The second-year annual review allows the DRSPC to conduct a substantive review and assess the viability of the research project. Progression to the PhD register is contingent on the student demonstrating progress according to disciplinary and departmental norms.

Third Year and Subsequent Annual Progress Review(s)

The third year and subsequent annual review(s) afford the DRSPC further opportunities to support and monitor the progress of the PhD student.

The fourth-year progress review provides an opportunity to confirm that the student is on track to submit and that department actions have been taken to facilitate submission and examination.

9.2.1. Mode of assessment

The mode of assessment for the annual and substantive review will be determined at departmental level to ensure that academic diversity and different types of research undertaken within doctoral programmes are accommodated as appropriate. At the same time, it is essential that a standard of quality be maintained to ensure that the student is making satisfactory progress in pursuit of the aims and objectives of their research as agreed in the IMR.

The following will form the basis of the decision of the DRSPC:

- Annual progress review form Part A, which includes a statement of progress and research plan from the student, the expected time to completion and the number of credits taken to date;
- Annual progress review form Part B with the student's feedback on supervisory and departmental support; and
- Interview (optional), which can be requested by the DRSPC or the student.

9.3.2. Assessment outcomes

There are clear set of potential outcomes of the annual student progression review, with associated result codes. Not all result codes can be used at every stage of the PhD.

Result	Meaning
Progress on PhD Track <i>[Can only be awarded in Year 1 and Year 2 (FT), and in Years 1,2, and 3 (PT)]</i>	The university believes adequate progress is being made for this point in the research degree (early years).
Progress on PhD <i>[Can be awarded in Years 2, 3, 4 and subsequent years up to 6 (FT) or Years 3, 4, 5, 6 (PT)] and subsequent years up to 9. This result is not available in Year 1.]</i>	The university believes adequate progress is being made for this point in the research degree, having completed the substantive review process.
Progress with conditions	The progress made to date is not what is expected for this stage in the degree. The student may register and continue, but a change in performance is needed. Normally, the conditions set will be revisited by the DRSPC at the subsequent year's annual progression review.
Not progress	The University will not permit further registration as (a) the work produced is not of the required standard; and/or (b) the project is no longer viable.
Transfer to research master's degree	The student can complete the thesis and have it assessed as a research master's degree.

The DRSPC's recommendations are recorded in the Annual Progress Review Form and a report is returned to the Graduate School.

All students and their supervisors will be informed of recommendations of the DRSPC before the June Research Student Progression Board. Students and supervisors may discuss the case with the DRSPC at that point, and submit any further evidence that might impact on the recommendation.

The June Research Student Progression Board assesses the progress made by each research student, and communicates to the student if any supplemental work is required prior to assessment of the full year's work by the Autumn Examination Board.

Where a student has been requested to submit supplemental work, the DRSPC must evaluate the progress of the student and submit recommendations to the August Research Progression Board.

The August Research Student Progression Board assesses the progress made by students who have been requested to submit supplemental work and it communicates to the student the results prior to ratification by the Autumn Examination Board.

Following the Autumn Research Progression Board, departments commit their results to the student record system for ratification at the Autumn Examination Board.

9.3.3. Student appeals of DRSPC's decisions regarding progress

A student who wishes to appeal a decision of the DRSPC may do so by writing to their head of department and/or research co-ordinator within one week of receiving formal notification of the DRSPC decision.

On receipt of the student's written appeal the head of department and/or research co-ordinator shall forward the appeal to the Dean of Graduate Studies. The relevant autumn examination board will review the appeals from students to determine:

- Whether or not fair procedures were followed in the progression assessment, and
- Whether or not a fair outcome was reached in the circumstances pertaining to the student.

It is not the function of the autumn examination board to re-assess the student. However, in order to consider appeals, the autumn examination board should be provided with a copy of all documentation pertaining to the student that was available to the DRSPC.

The Dean of Graduate Studies will inform the student, in writing, of the decision. Upon receipt of written notification from the Dean of Graduate Studies, the student may then, if they so wish, initiate a formal appeal to the university in line with the applicable policy.

10. Suspension and withdrawal from research programmes

10.1. Suspension

In circumstances where there is an unavoidable disruption in studies, the university may allow a student to suspend registration for a specified period of time. While suspended, the student is not a registered student of the university, is not expected to work on the research project, and does not pay fees. During a period of suspension, a student should not be engaged in advancing the research project and should not expect supervision or guidance from the supervisor, or access to university services such as computing facilities, teaching, Library, and other support services. In exceptional cases, a request can be made to the Registrar for continuing access to the Library.

Periods of suspension are not considered for the purposes of calculating minimum or maximum durations.

Request for suspensions must be approved by the student's DRSPC and by the registrar. Should a student require a break in their studies, the student must complete the relevant form available on Student records website to request a permission to suspend their studies and submit the form to their DRSPC together with appropriate documentary evidence in advance of the intended break.

Suspensions can only be obtained for a minimum of one semester and maximum one year. Should a student request a further suspension, a new request must be made. Suspension requests should normally be granted at the annual progress review.

Suspensions should not exceed three years cumulatively over the course of the programme. Should a student request a suspension exceeding cumulatively three years, the department may ask the student to reapply to the programme.

Suspensions will not be applied retrospectively. Students returning after an unauthorized suspension should request permission to re-join their programme. They can do this by completing and returning a Research and Taught Postgraduate Re-Registration request form, available on the university web- site. Any outstanding fee liabilities must be settled before a re-registration request will be considered.

10.2. Withdrawal

Withdrawal is where a student leaves their programme of study and ends all activity associated with their studies before they have completed the programme for which they are registered. A student should complete the relevant form and submit to the DRSPC and registrar for approval.

Any student who wishes to resume their programme after having been withdrawn will be required to re-apply for admission.

11. Thesis preparation and submission

[Due to Covid-19, MU has prepared **Guidelines for submission of a Research Thesis and conducting a Viva Voce Examination during the COVID-19 restrictions.**](#)

Research students are required to submit gum bound copies of their thesis for examination. After the thesis is examined and corrections made as applicable, students are required to submit hard bound copies of their thesis together with an electronic version before their degree can be approved for award.

11.1. Thesis formatting and presentation

Each departmental graduate study handbook should set out the departmental style and procedures for written theses and viva voce examination (henceforth referred to as the viva).

Recommendations for the presentation of the final (hardbound) version of postgraduate research theses are available on the Examinations Office website.

11.2. Thesis editing

Professional editing services must not be used for preparation of the thesis. Students found to have used such assistance will be deemed to be in breach of examination regulations unless their thesis submission is accompanied by a letter from the supervisor sanctioning its use. It is proposed that if a supervisor deems editing necessary under particular circumstances the supervisor may request this, but should check the thesis for possible anomalies introduced in the process.

11.3. Submission of a thesis for examination

Once a student's DRSPC has approved the completion of the individualised programme and has satisfied itself that sufficient credits have been obtained, the student can proceed towards submission of the PhD thesis. Students must be registered for the correct qualification in order to submit their thesis.

The supervisor confirms approval of the final draft of the PhD thesis for examination to the head of department, before the student can submit his/her thesis. In the case of students pursuing joint PhD programmes, supervisor(s) from the partner university (or universities) must provide a written statement confirming their approval for examination, which must be attached to the Maynooth University supervisor's approval. The head of department confirms approval for examination of the final draft of the PhD thesis to Registry (Examinations Office). Relevant forms are available on the university's website.

Where a student considers that approval has been withheld unreasonably, he/she may appeal to the Registrar or Dean of Graduate Studies.

Following approval of the appointment of examiners, the head of department confirms approval for examination of the final draft of the PhD thesis to the Examinations Office. A confirmation is sought from the Fees Office that the student is not in arrears and from the Student Records Office that the student is registered for the correct qualification. The thesis is sent out for examination once the relevant approvals and confirmations are obtained.

A student should lodge the PhD thesis (gum bound) at least three months in advance of the appropriate faculty meeting at which the examiners' reports are considered. Faculty meetings are normally held in September, October, November, January, March and May. Students pursuing a joint PhD programme may be required to submit their thesis earlier if their viva is held at the partner institution and they should consult their local supervisor about this possibility.

Three copies of the PhD thesis, (gum-bound) and completed Submission Forms for Doctoral Thesis should be sent to Registry (examinations office). Each copy of the thesis must be accompanied by an abstract, not exceeding 300 words. Students pursuing a joint PhD programme should refer to the memorandum of agreement (MoA) applicable to their programme as the MoA determines the required number of copies and other requirements applicable to the submission of their thesis.

Work for which a degree in this university, or elsewhere, has already been obtained will not be accepted as the main work for a PhD degree.

12. Viva Voce Examination

Due to Covid-19, MU has prepared [Guidelines for submission of a Research Thesis and conducting a Viva Voce Examination during the COVID-19 restrictions](#).

The aim of the viva is to assess the quality of the thesis. Examiners will typically elicit information pertaining to the following:

- To allow the student to defend the original contribution of the thesis.
- To expand upon and/or clarify the student's ideas.
- To establish that the research has been carried out by the student independently, as appropriate to the discipline.
- To determine the student's depth of knowledge and understanding of the field of study and of the literature.
- To examine the conceptual approach, research methods and techniques used in the thesis.
- To examine what was learnt and whether new knowledge was generated.
- To consider the student's ability to communicate his or her subject and to defend their research.
- To give advice on changes, future direction and possible publication.

12.1. *Establishment of examination board*

Detailed information about various aspects of Viva Voce examination is provided in the [Code of Practice for Viva Voce examination](#).

The examination board normally consists of two examiners, at least one of whom is internal and one external and an independent Chair. Examiners must be approved by the faculty on the recommendation of the head of department and in agreement with the supervisor. In the case of a thesis being presented by a full-time member of the academic staff of the university, the internal examiner is replaced by a second external examiner. Two external examiners may be required in cases where there is no suitable internal examiner available. One of the external examiners must take responsibility for the role of internal examiners, as indicated by the head of department.

In the case of a joint PhD thesis, the composition of the examination board is detailed in the relevant Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) and students should refer to their MoA for full details. In all cases the examination board is overseen by an independent chair.

The Registrar appoints the chair when the thesis has been submitted for examination to the Examination Office. The Examinations Office forwards a copy of the PhD thesis, the 300-word abstract, and a report form to each of the examiners and the chair.

12.2. *Examination of PhD thesis*

With the agreement of the examiners and the student, the supervisor may attend the examination, but does not question the student and can only provide clarification on any matters when requested by the Board. The supervisor does not participate in the final decision and leaves the examination room while deliberations take place, unless asked to remain by the chair.

12.1.1. *Venue*

The viva should normally be held on campus. In exceptional circumstances (for example, the examination of students based overseas) the examination may be held elsewhere, provided the student agrees to the arrangement. Video conferencing may be used in some circumstances. Examination Office should be consulted where use of video conferencing is considered.

Care should be taken in choosing the venue for the viva to ensure that the examination can be conducted in an accessible, relaxed and comfortable atmosphere, without risk of interruption and extraneous noise.

12.1.2. Prior to the examination

Prior to the Viva Voce, each examiner must separately complete an individual pre-report on the thesis. A preliminary meeting of chair and examiners is held (often on the same day, prior to the time scheduled for the student and their supervisor to attend) to review the pre-reports and to agree the format of the examination. This preliminary meeting should allow sufficient time to (1) agree the format of the Viva Voce and (2) review the pre-reports. The supervisor(s) should normally be available for consultation with the examiners during this meeting. The chair and examiners will agree the format and anticipated length of the examination

12.1.3. Viva voce examination

Detailed information about various aspects of Viva voce examination is provided in the “Code of practice for Viva voce examination” available at the university website.

12.1.4. Possible outcomes of Viva voce examination

The examiners should not recommend awarding the degree unless they judge the work to be worthy of publication, in full or in part, as a work of serious scholarship.

The examiners may recommend that the student should:

	Recommendation of Examiners	Registration and Fee Implications (if any)
1	Be awarded the research degree without further examination or amendment.	No further registration or fee required
2	Be awarded the research without further examination, subject to making the changes specified, which must be subsequently carried out to the satisfaction of the internal examiner	No further registration or fee required. Note: if revisions take more than six months, the student must re-register and a continuation fee will apply.
3	Be awarded the research degree without further examination subject to making specified changes to the satisfaction of both internal and external examiners.	No further fee or registration required. Note: if revisions take more than six months, the student must re-register and a continuation fee will apply
4	Not be awarded the research degree, but be permitted to re-submit the thesis in a revised form for re-examination by the same examiners. In this case, the areas requiring major amendments will be detailed by the Examiners.	The student should re- register for the duration of the period of revision. A continuation fee will apply.
5	Not be awarded the research degree and not be permitted to submit for re-examination for the Research Degree.	No further registration permitted.

Where the degree is not awarded but the student is permitted to re-submit the thesis in a revised form for re-examination by the same examiners (category 4 above), the student must be registered in order for the revised thesis to be accepted for re-examination. Normally the revised thesis should be submitted within 12 months following the examination.

12.1.5. After Viva voce examination

If the examiners recommend that the PhD degree be awarded, the student must submit three hard bound copies of the thesis, including an electronic copy (on CD/DVD) of one PDF file mirroring the hard-bound copy and embodying any changes prescribed by the examiners. In the case of a thesis submitted for a joint PhD programme, the number of hardbound copies and CDs is determined in the Memorandum of Agreement applicable to the relevant joint PhD programme.

The examiners' report will not be considered by faculty until three hardbound copies and the electronic copy of the revised thesis incorporating the recommended changes and confirmed by the internal examiner (or internal and external examiner, as applicable depending on the outcome of the Viva), have been lodged with Registry (Examinations Office).

Where the opinions of the examiners differ, each examiner should submit a separate written report for consideration by the appropriate faculty without the requirement for submission of hard-bound copies of the thesis.

The faculty may in such cases:

- Accept a majority recommendation (provided that the majority recommendation includes at least one external examiner)
- Accept the recommendation of the external examiner, or
- Require the appointment of an additional external examiner.

Following Faculty approval, the award is then ratified by Academic Council and the Conferring Office is notified.

The conferring office informs the National University of Ireland (NUI) of the award of degree following the approval of the appropriate Maynooth University Faculty and Academic Council.

13. Deposit of thesis and eThesis

A copy of the thesis plus an electronic copy (on CD/DVD) of one PDF file mirroring the hard-bound thesis will be lodged in the university library and in the institutional eTheses archive and made available to readers. All theses shall remain the property of the university and may be made available in the university library.

In the case of a joint PhD programme, the partner institution(s) might require additional copies of the thesis. Students should consult the relevant MOA governing their joint PhD programme.

Students are required to complete the thesis depositor declaration form when lodging hardbound copies of the thesis for the PhD degree. The author of a thesis is required to make a signed declaration at the time of submission of the thesis for examination to Maynooth University, regarding the use the university may make of this thesis. The declaration will allow the university, at its discretion to lend or, in accordance with the Copyright and Related Rights Act 2000, copy from this thesis, upon request.

Should the student wish to withhold permission for the use of her/his work, a written application must be made to the Dean of Graduate Studies at the time of submission of the thesis for examination. Such applications must have the written support of the author's supervisor or head of department. In the case of a joint PhD programme, the supervisor(s) at the partner institution(s) must also provide a statement of support of withholding. This application must state the reasons for the request for a stay on access and must provide a contact address. If permission to withhold access is granted the Thesis Depositor Declaration Form must be signed by the Dean of Graduate Studies.

The maximum length of a stay is two years. During this period of withheld permission, the thesis will only be consulted, lent or copied with the written permission of the author who is under an obligation to reply to all requests within a reasonable time. These requests are processed through the Dean of Graduate Studies. Should the author wish to withhold access beyond that time frame, s/he must make a further application to the Dean of Graduate Studies.

A declaration form is signed by each reader to agree their compliance with the lending and copying regulations.

14. Disputes

It is natural that students and supervisors encounter difficulties at some point during a student's PhD programme. Students and supervisors are encouraged to identify, address and settle issues as early as it becomes apparent that problems are arising. Initially problems should be addressed directly between the student and the supervisor(s). Where a dispute cannot be settled at this level, assistance should be sought from the head of department or the departmental postgraduate research coordinator. The head of department/postgraduate research coordinator should discuss the matter with the concerned student and supervisor(s) and write to them giving an opinion on the situation, requesting a written response.

If a satisfactory resolution is not reached, the dispute will be referred to the Dean of Graduate Studies.

15. Appeals

There is a provision for a student to appeal an examination result where there is perceived to be a failure in due process. The examination appeals procedure available on the Examination Office's website applies should a research student wishes to appeal the outcome of his/her viva voce examination.

Version History

Name of Document	Approved	Sponsor
Regulations for Postgraduate Research Degrees	Academic Council: September 2016	Prof Ronan Reilly
Code of Practice for Viva Voce Regulations	Academic Council: November 2018	Prof Maria Pramaggiore
PhD Registration and Progression (PhD Track)	Academic Council: February 2019	Prof Maria Pramaggiore
PhD Registration and Progression (PhD Track) – Implementation	Academic Council: February 2020	Niamh Lynch and Niamh Ni Shaidhail