

Code of Practice: Postgraduate Research Degrees 2016-17

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Code of Practice: Postgraduate Research Degrees

This document is a broad statement of University requirements covering departments' and supervisors' responsibilities. Students' responsibilities are outlined in the PGR student handbooks. This Code of Practice should be read in conjunction with the University Regulations. The "Dean" refers to the Executive Dean (or her/his deputy) or Dean of Partnerships (or her/his deputy). In practice, most decisions are referred to the Faculty Deputy Dean (Postgraduate Research Education) through the Postgraduate Research Education Team.

As a licensed sponsor of Tier 4 students, the University is required to implement Home Office immigration rules that are subject to change at any point during the year. Where immigration rules affect programmes of study the Tier 4 Policy Group, chaired by the Academic Registrar, will, through the International Services Team, inform academic departments of any new requirements and will communicate the changes to affected students. On occasion Home Office changes may necessitate an 'in year' amendment to the Code of Practice.

Students at Partner Institutions should note that in some cases additional local policies and procedures apply.

1. Departments' Responsibilities

Each Department, School or Centre with research students should:

1.1. Graduate Director

Designate a Director of Research Students (DRS), or equivalent, who is an experienced research student supervisor. The DRS will be responsible to the Head of Department (HoD) for the departmental arrangements for PGR supervision and for liaising with and reporting as necessary to the Dean.

1.2. Admissions

Publicise information about entry requirements and processes (including interviews), areas where supervision is offered, whom to contact and information about funding sources administered by the department. Designate a member of academic staff with responsibility for research student admissions, who may be the DRS or some other member of the department.

Ensure that where an application is received to undertake research in an area in which the department offers supervision, two designated and trained members of staff are involved in making the admissions decision. These staff may consult other staff who are potential supervisors to discuss the application.

1.3. Departmental arrangements

Ensure that on acceptance of an offer of admission (that is normally well before registration) all new research students are supplied with the departmental arrangements for research students. The departmental documentation and the arrangements it describes should be appropriate for the degree programme concerned (i.e. there will be some variations depending on whether the student is registered for a PhD or a Masters degree by research) and should be approved by the Dean. Departmental documentation will be monitored every three years, or sooner if the department wishes to make any major changes to the arrangements.

1.4. Student induction

Ensure that all new research students are provided with an induction programme at the start of their period of study and are strongly encouraged to attend University and/or Faculty induction events (see section 5 below). During the induction, or within the first three weeks of term, the DRS should discuss the details contained in this Code of Practice, the PGR student handbook and the departmental arrangements relating to them. Students should be given information about expectations and conventions regarding referencing and citations, and be advised about the University's policy on plagiarism and academic offences. Students should be required to sign that they have read and understood the documentation.

1.5. Supervisors

Ensure that appropriate supervisory arrangements are in place for all research students. Each student must have at least one supervisor who is engaged in research activity and has relevant publications. Where two supervisors are appointed, one supervisor must be nominated as the lead/primary supervisor who will be the first point of contact for the student, and responsible for record keeping and providing reports. Where a member of staff who has not previously supervised a student through to completion is appointed as sole supervisor, support must be provided through the department's normal mentoring arrangements as well as through the Supervisory Panel (see section 6 below).

1.6. Replacement supervisors

Ensure that adequate arrangements are made for supervision when any supervisor either leaves the University or is on leave and is not carrying on with supervision during this period. Any changes in supervision must be approved by the DRS. Any permanent changes, as well as arrangements for replacement supervision where a member of staff is on leave, must also be reported to the Postgraduate Research Education Team on the January and June progress lists.

1.7. List of supervisors

Keep an up-to-date record of all research students and their supervisors and make this available to the Postgraduate Research Education Team on request.

1.8. Supervision and the frequency of supervisory meetings

Agree suitable norms regarding the frequency of formal supervisory meetings between students and supervisors and ensure they are followed by supervisors. These will probably vary according to the discipline and the stage that the student has reached. However, students and supervisors are required to communicate, whether face-to-face or by electronic means, to engage in discussion/review of the student's work and progress at least once a month (bi-monthly for part-time students). For students with a Tier 4 visa the majority of contact should be face-to-face. Departments may also wish to specify or recommend the duration of contact. These norms should be included in the written documentation supplied to students and supervisors. Supervision should normally be provided until the student has submitted a final version of their thesis for the award of their degree, including any referral period or to complete corrections.

A record of supervisory meetings/communications should be kept in accordance with the [Progress and Appeals Procedures for Research Degree Students](#).

1.9. Supervisory Panel

Ensure that a Supervisory Panel involving the supervisor(s) and at least one member of staff who is not the student's supervisor is held at least twice a year for each full-time student and once a year for part-time students. If a student or supervisor is away from the University in the period when the panel is due, the panel should be held by Skype, e-mail or video-link.

1.10. Time allocation for supervision

Ensure adequate academic staff time is allocated for the supervision of each research student as part of the department's workload allocation model. There can be some flexibility in these arrangements, for example, time allocations might vary according to the stage the student has reached and whether he/she is studying away from the University.

1.11. Problems with supervision

Have a clear and well-publicised procedure that enables students to raise problems regarding their supervisory arrangements. Students should be encouraged to raise problems with their supervisor in the first instance. However, departments should make it clear that students have the right to discuss supervisory problems with a member of staff who is not involved in their supervision, such as the chair of the Research Students' Progress Board (RSPB), the DRS or HoD. Students should also be told that if they feel unable to approach a member of the department they are free to contact the Dean or the Postgraduate Research Education Team. Discussions about problems with supervision should remain confidential if the student requests this. Students may request a change of supervisor. The chair of the RSPB should consider these requests and accommodate them where practicable, noting that it may not always be possible for suitable alternative arrangements to be made.

1.12. Submission deadlines and minimum and maximum periods

Ensure that students understand the University regulations on thesis submission deadlines. Students should aim to submit their thesis during the last term of their minimum period (three years full-time). Students permitted to enter a one-year completion period at the end of their minimum period do so on the understanding that their full thesis will be ready for submission by the end of that completion period. The minimum period of study may be reduced in exceptional circumstances, with the Dean's approval.

1.13. Progress guidelines

Provide guidelines for students regarding the volume and standard of work to be expected at the end of each year of their studies and for confirmation using a milestones document. The milestones document should be included in the PGR Student Handbook supplied to students and supervisors. It should be made clear that progress from one year to the next, confirmation of PhD status and progress into the completion year, will depend on satisfactory achievement of the necessary work and attainment of published milestones.

1.14. Research Students' Progress Board

Ensure that a Research Students' Progress Board (RSPB) is held at least twice a year to review the progress of all research students and report this to the Postgraduate Research Education Team. The first meeting should be held between December and mid-January. The second meeting should be held in the summer term before the end of June. If the RSPB requires a third meeting (for example to review the progress of particular students) this should be held in September (see section 7 below).

1.15. Reports on students' progress

Ensure that an individual report on each student's progress is provided to the Dean towards the end of each year of their study and at the point of confirmation of PhD status. This should indicate the state of the research and the amount of work that has been carried out, as well as a recommendation from the RSPB as to whether the student be allowed to progress to the following year and/or whether a downgrading, upgrading, confirmation of PhD status or discontinuation is recommended. Where a student has a Tier 4 visa the supervisor will be asked to provide monthly confirmation of their contact with the student.

1.16. Staff induction and training

Ensure that all new members of staff who may become research student supervisors are seen by the

DRS to discuss the University Code of Practice and that all supervisors are supplied with a copy of the Department's supervisory arrangements every year. The Department should also ensure that less experienced members of staff who have not supervised a PhD through to completion attend the University's training for research student supervisors and that opportunities for sharing good practice in supervision are included in the arrangements for training and support provided to all academic staff.

Ensure that all members of staff with responsibility for admissions decisions have:

- Read the Handbook on Graduate Admissions, which describes the central and departmental responsibilities in respect of graduate admissions and includes guidance on overseas qualifications, handling student references, English Language requirements and equality and diversity; and
- Been briefed on the departmental arrangements for processing applications, by the DRS, the HoD or his/her nominee in this area.

1.17. Academic networking

Ensure that research students are advised of the importance of making contact with other researchers in the field and of presenting their work to academic audiences. This should include advising them on the opportunities to present work to staff and fellow postgraduates and about attendance and participation in appropriate seminars and conferences.

1.18. Facilities

Ensure that during the minimum period all research students have access to the departmental facilities and equipment necessary to enable them to complete their research degree successfully.

1.19. Student feedback

Ensure that student feedback is collected and reviewed in accordance with the University's Student Representative Policy. A summary of the feedback and, where appropriate, details of any follow-up should be provided to the Dean on an annual basis for consideration by the autumn term Education Committee.

1.20. External supervisors

Where an external supervisor is appointed, ensure that s/he receives a copy of the University Code of Practice and complies with its requirements.

2. Supervisors' Responsibilities

Supervisors have a responsibility to:

2.1. Regulations, Code of Practice and guidelines

Familiarise themselves with the University regulations for research degrees and associated policies, this Code of Practice, and the departmental supervisory arrangements.

2.2. Regular meetings

Maintain regular contact with the student through meetings until the thesis has been submitted and, if this arises, during any referral period and corrections. In the case of distance learning students, supervisors must maintain regular contact with the student through electronic and/or other means.

When supervising a student with a Tier 4 visa ensure that the majority of contact is face-to-face and that where this is not possible a record is kept on the student's file confirming the arrangements that have been agreed in the absence of face-to-face contact.

2.3. Research guidance

Provide guidance about the nature and standard of research work expected, including advice on attaining that standard, together with advice on academic practice in the discipline, matters of research design, ethical issues, and appropriate health and safety issues. Supervisors should make it clear to each research student that the research and writing up should be capable of completion within the minimum period and provide guidance on the appropriate volume of research work for the degree in question. They should also assist each research student in developing a clear timetable of work and emphasise the importance of keeping to it.

2.4. Written work, oral presentations and feedback

Request written work and oral presentations as appropriate and comment on such work within a reasonable time.

2.5. Academic Offences

Supervisors must encourage their students to read the Academic Offences Policy. Supervisors are encouraged to conduct formative exercises to run student's work through plagiarism detection software in their first term of study.

The University reserves the right to use all legitimate means at its disposal to detect instances of plagiarism.

2.6. Accessibility, leave and supervisory changes

Be reasonably accessible to students during term time and advise them of any lengthy absences during the vacation. Keep each student well informed in advance about any prospective periods of leave and the planned supervisory arrangements during the leave.

2.7. Update knowledge and skills

Ensure that their knowledge and skills are as up-to-date as possible. Less experienced supervisors who have not supervised a PhD through to completion must attend the University's course on supervising research degrees and will be provided with a mentor (see 1.5 above).

2.8. Research training

Identify and record the student's training needs at the beginning of their studies and review them on a regular basis and at least every Supervisory Panel. Ensure that the student has opportunities for

developing appropriate generic and research skills and that a record of course/workshop completion and attendance is kept. This may be in the form of a copy of a record maintained by the student that has been signed off by the supervisor. Keep up to date with courses available through [Proficio](#) and encourage the student to book onto relevant training.

2.9. Records of meetings and written work

Keep a record of dates of formal supervisions with the student and of written work submitted, including the feedback and when it was provided, which can be produced later if necessary.

In addition, when supervising a student with a Tier 4 visa provide monthly confirmation, via the appropriate proforma, of contact with the student.

2.10. Supervisory Panels (see section 6 below)

Ensure that meetings of the Supervisory Panel are arranged for each student in accordance with the requirements set out in paragraph 6.2.

2.11. Submit reports

Report on each student's progress to the Supervisory Panel indicating what has been achieved, advising the panel where s/he believes that the student is unlikely to reach the standard for the degree for which s/he is registered or where progress is slow, and ensure that the chair of the panel forwards a report on the board to the DRS in time for the next DRS Review/RSPB meeting.

2.12. Advising student on progress

Warn and advise students in writing, with a copy to the DRS, where work is not of the appropriate standard or is being produced too slowly, and of steps that might be taken to remedy the situation.

2.13. Employment

Where appropriate, encourage students to think about their subsequent employment, within or outside academia, and direct the student to suitable sources of training, advice and support.

2.14. Preparation for examination of the research thesis

Ensure that students understand the requirements of the degree, provide guidance on the examination process, help students to prepare for the viva, and direct the student to appropriate training.

2.15. Approval of title

The supervisor and Head of Department are responsible for approving the proposed title for the thesis, which indicates that the thesis is close to submission. The Approval of Title form should be submitted to the Postgraduate Research Education Team at least two months prior to submission in order for the appointment of the examiners process to start.

2.16. Appointment of examiners for the research thesis

Nominate examiners for a candidate's thesis.

2.17. Thesis examination

The supervisor should not normally be present during the viva but is encouraged to be in the department on the day to support the candidate at the conclusion of the viva. With the permission of the candidate and the examiners, the supervisor is permitted to be present when the examiners inform the candidate of the result of the viva.

2.18. RCUK DTPs, CDTs, and Project-linked studentships

Supervisors of students funded by RCUKs, such as through DTPs, CDTs or Project-linked studentships, may be required to meet additional expectations in all areas of supervision and reporting depending on the conditions of the RCUK award.

3. Admissions

3.1. Research opportunities

Potential students should be provided with information on the:

- areas in which supervision is offered;
- research degree programmes offered;
- research training provided and;
- research environment in the department.

3.2. Funding information and selection

Departments should publicise information on any sources of funding administered by the department, including how to apply for any scholarships/studentships (e.g. Silberrad, University of Essex Scholarships and research council studentships) and the criteria for awarding support. At least three people should be involved in the decision to allocate funding.

3.3. Entry criteria and how to apply

The department's entry criteria should be publicised along with information about how to apply. Guidance should be given on preparing a research proposal, where appropriate, making it clear what is required. There is a standard University postgraduate application form and Notes of Guidance on additional requirements.

3.4. Considering applications

A decision to reject an application can be taken by one member of staff where the application is to conduct research in a field where the department does not offer supervision.

In all other cases decisions must be taken by two designated and trained members of staff (see section 1.2).

The Dean must approve applications from candidates who do not satisfy the standard entry requirements.

3.5. Recording decisions

A record should be kept of the reasons for rejecting an application or for making an offer for an alternative programme. A record may be placed within the applicant's file, and/or a note may be recorded under the 'Notes' facility on the Applicant Details screen of the Postgraduate Admissions System.

3.6. Turnaround times

An applicant should normally receive a response within four weeks. The University's advertised service level to applicants is a maximum period of six weeks. The additional fortnight may be necessary in order to further explore the applicant's research topic and ascertain whether suitable supervision is available, or to validate references. Applications may also require the longer processing period over the Christmas vacation. Graduate Admissions should be aware of any applications which are expected to need longer than this maximum period and the applicant should be informed accordingly.

3.7. Equality and Diversity

All admissions decisions must relate to a student's estimated potential to succeed academically on a programme. Any criterion used should be an appropriate and genuine requirement, which does not discriminate directly or indirectly against any individual or group on the grounds of gender, colour, ethnic or national origin, age, socio-economic background, disability, religious or political beliefs and

affiliations, family circumstances or responsibilities, sexual orientation, gender identity or other irrelevant distinction. Further guidance is available in the Equality Policy and Strategy 2015-18 Available on the Equality and Diversity website at:
www.essex.ac.uk/eo/codespolicies/codesdefault.htm.

3.8. Communicating admissions decisions

Offer letters are issued by the Head of Graduate Admissions on behalf of the Dean. The offer letter will state the degree programme for which the student is being offered a place, the start date of the study period, the duration of the programme, the estimated cost of tuition fees and living expenses and any conditions which must be met in order for the place to be confirmed. The web address for the Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Degrees is also provided. From May of each year onwards, applicants holding offers and receiving new offers are sent information on University accommodation, how to access the online International Student Handbook and confirmation of the tuition fee amounts for the forthcoming year.

Applicants who are rejected are informed in writing by the Graduate Admissions Office.

3.9. Monitoring

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

The University's Education Committee receives a summary of monitoring of gender, disability and ethnicity for applications and rejections at its autumn meeting each year. In advance of Education Committee, each department will receive a detailed report from the Head of Graduate Admissions, with a request for feedback on any anomalies.

TURNAROUND TIMES

The Head of Graduate Admissions will monitor the turnaround times of research degree applications in accordance with paragraph 4.6 and will raise any concerns with the Head of Department.

4. Student Induction

4.1. Information

Departments should provide research students with the following information as soon as possible after they accept their offer and no later than the end of the second week of their first term:

- general information about the University and its postgraduate portfolio in the relevant subject(s);
- the University's regulations and procedures for research degrees;
- the names and contact details of the student's supervisor(s) and information about supervisory arrangements;
- general information about student support and welfare services;
- a summary of the facilities that will be made available to the student;
- relevant health and safety and other legislative information.

4.2. Face-to-face induction

Departments should strongly encourage students to attend university-wide induction events such as the Welcome Conference. In addition, departments should hold a face-to-face student induction no later than the end of the third week of the first term, ideally this should be held before the Welcome Conference. This should cover:

- the University's and the students' responsibilities as set out in this Code of Practice and the PGR Student Handbook;
- the challenges that will typically face research students during the course of their studies and where guidance may be sought in the event of difficulties;
- progress, confirmation and completion procedures and requirements;
- the University's research ethics and codes and those of relevant professional bodies and discipline groups;
- issues concerning authorship, plagiarism, intellectual property and data protection;
- details about opportunities and requirements for skills development;
- opportunities for careers advice and preparing for post-graduation;
- opportunities for postgraduates to be represented on departmental student liaison committees and the Education Committee;
- opportunities for interdisciplinary activities; and
- departmental policies on funding attendance at conferences.

4.3. Distance learning students and January or April starters

Departments should ensure that distance learning research students or students who register after the beginning of the academic year receive written information about all of the above if they are unable to attend the department's induction programme.

5. Supervisory Panels

5.1. Composition

Supervisory Panels should comprise of a usual minimum of the student, at least one supervisor (or in exceptional circumstances where the supervisor is on leave, an acting supervisor may attend) and one other academic. Where the supervisor is a less experienced member of staff who has not supervised a student through to completion, the chair must be an experienced supervisor. The Chair of the Supervisory Board should not:

- Be a partner or a close relative of the supervisor (main, joint or secondary), or
- Have a professional or personal relationship with the student that might give rise to a conflict of interest

5.2. Timetabling and frequency of meetings

Supervisors should ensure that Supervisory Panels are arranged at least twice a year for full-time students and once a year for part-time students until they have submitted. Virtual meetings can take place via video or telephone conferencing (such as Skype) or email. Virtual meetings must not breach progress monitoring requirements for students subject to immigration control.

There is now no general requirement for Distance Learning students to attend face-to-face Supervisory Panels and may have all Supervisory Panels held via Skype if deemed more appropriate. If a department wishes to specify face-to-face Supervisory Panels or other 'on campus' activities for a Distance Learning student, then this must be done when the details of arrangements are sent to the Dean for approval under Regulation 4.5.

5.3. Advice, monitoring and reports

The purpose of Supervisory Panels is to provide the student with a wider range of advice on their research and to provide an opportunity to reflect on the student's progress. It is also the role of the chair of the panel to prepare a formal report on the student's progress for the DRS and/or the RSPB. At each meeting, the Supervisory Panel should receive a written report from the student on progress and a future work schedule as well as oral or written comments on the student's progress from the supervisor. Though not compulsory, requesting a written report from the student should be seen as best practice as it gives students the opportunity to disclose any extenuating circumstances. The Supervisory Panel may also receive a formal report of extenuating circumstances from the student, which should be considered by the panel and included in the report to the RSPB. At the end of the meeting, the chair should complete a report of the panel, including any recommendations made, which should subsequently be seen and acknowledged by the supervisor and the student. If there is concern about the student's progress this must be indicated clearly in the chair's report. A copy of the report should then be forwarded to the DRS, along with the student's report, for consideration at the next RSPB meeting.

5.4. Confirmation of PhD status and completion

All PhD students are initially registered as MPhil/PhD and must be confirmed as an MPhil or PhD student at the following times:

Students in the Faculties of Humanities and Social Sciences

By the end of the first year, for full-time PhD students (or equivalent for part-time students) a Supervisory Panel shall be held to consider a student's progress with MPhil/PhD registration against the departmental criteria for the confirmation of PhD status, and will make a recommendation to the RSPB. If PhD status is not confirmed at the meeting, the case will be reconsidered at the next Supervisory Panel on one further occasion, ahead of entering into the second year of study (or

equivalent for part-time students).

If the Supervisory Panel is satisfied that a student has produced work of sufficient quality and quantity to provide evidence of appropriate PhD-level progress and agreed milestones for confirmation had been met, a recommendation should be made to the RSPB that PhD status should be confirmed by the end of the first year (or equivalent for part-timers).

Students in the Faculty of Science and Health

By the end of the first term of the second year for full-time PhD students (or equivalent for part-time students) a Supervisory Panel shall be held to consider a student's progress with MPhil/PhD registration against the departmental criteria for the confirmation of PhD status, and will make a recommendation to the RSPB. If PhD status is not confirmed at the meeting, the case will be reconsidered at the next supervisory board on one further occasion, ahead of entering into the second term of the second year of study (or equivalent for part-time students).

If the Supervisory Panel is satisfied that a student has produced work of sufficient quality and quantity to provide evidence of appropriate PhD-level progress and agreed milestones for confirmation had been met, a recommendation should be made to the RSPB that PhD status should be confirmed by the end of the first term of the second year of study (or equivalent for part-timers).

Students registered prior to October 2014 must have their confirmation decision made in line with regulations in operation at the time of their admission.

For **all research students**, if a student has not submitted their thesis within the minimum period, a Supervisory Panel shall be held at the end of a student's minimum period to consider whether they are ready to move into completion and will make a recommendation to the RSPB.

5.5. Panel membership and internal examining

No member of staff who has been a member of a Supervisory Panel during the final six months before submission of the thesis may be nominated as the internal examiner.

6. Research Students' Progress Board and DRS Reviews

6.1. Composition and role

The Postgraduate Research Students' Progress Board (RSPB), to be established by each department, should be chaired by the DRS or HoD, and should include at least two other experienced supervisors. It should review the progress of every research student through to the award of a degree, withdrawal or failure, on the basis of the reports from the Supervisory Panel, including the written report from the student and any submission of extenuating circumstances. Where no Supervisory Panel has taken place, for instance because a student is carrying out research abroad, the supervisor and the student must each submit a progress report. A decision/recommendation for discontinuation, downgrading or upgrading, or to confirm PhD status or change to MPhil, to permit entry into completion, or to extend the minimum period can only be made by the RSPB (see section 7.4, 7.5 and 7.6). Where the RSPB is considering a recommendation from a student's Supervisory Panel of discontinuation or downgrading, or at confirmation to change a student's status to MPhil, the RSPB membership must include at least two members who were not on the student's last Supervisory Panel. Smaller departments may want to co-opt a supervisor from another department in a cognate discipline as a member of the RSPB if the department finds it difficult to satisfy this requirement.

6.2. Frequency and timing

There should be at least two formal reviews of research students' progress each year, one held mid-year in December/January and one in June. Any review that recommends progression to the next year, confirmation of PhD status or to change to MPhil, entry into the completion period and any recommendation for discontinuation, or downgrading or upgrading should normally take the form of a face-to-face meeting of the RSPB. Any other review may take the form of a meeting of the RSPB on the basis of the written reports from Supervisory Panels.

An additional meeting of the RSPB may be required in September to consider any outstanding progress decisions which need to be made before the start of the new academic year.

6.3. Taught course requirements

For students on a research degree programme that includes compulsory taught course requirements, as part of the consideration of students' progress, the RSPB shall receive a copy of the recommendations from the appropriate Board of Examiners meeting, including the approved marks.

6.4. Reports and recommendations to the Dean

The RSPB will report its decisions/recommendations on each student to the Postgraduate Research Education Team at least annually as follows:

- a list of the decisions on students who have been allowed to proceed with their studies either unconditionally or subject to further review at a specified date if appropriate;
- a list of the decisions on those MPhil/PhD students whose status should be confirmed as PhD;
- a list of the decisions on those students who have been permitted to move into completion;
- a list of the decisions on those Masters by Dissertation students who have been upgraded to MPhil or MPhil/PhD, and those MPhil students who have been upgraded to MPhil/PhD;
- individual reports on students where the recommendation to the Dean is: change of status for a student for the degree of MPhil, MPhil/PhD or PhD to either the degree of MPhil or of Masters by Dissertation; extension to the minimum period; discontinuation; or permission to move into further completion (only applies to students admitted before October 2008);
- in cases where replacement supervisors are appointed, or a change of supervisor has taken place, this should also be reported to the Postgraduate Research Education Team.

In all cases, a copy of the Supervisory Panel report on each student shall be forwarded to the Postgraduate Research Education Team.

6.5. Downgrading or discontinuation

If the RSPB is minded to make a recommendation that a student's status be downgraded or studies discontinued, the student must be offered an opportunity to discuss this with the RSPB before the final recommendation is forwarded to the Dean and if appropriate to present evidence about any extenuating circumstances. The student should be invited to meet with the RSPB, or the Chair of the RSPB, in advance of the formal recommendation being made to the Dean. If downgrading or discontinuation is confirmed by the RSPB and the Dean, the student may then request a review of the recommendation (see Appeals against Progress Decisions). The Board should in all cases inform the student in writing of the Board's recommendation and of the opportunity to appeal.

6.6. Mid-year recommendations and special meetings

The RSPB can recommend discontinuation, downgrading or upgrading at any point in the academic year and special meetings can be convened at any time. Upgrading can only take place in the minimum period while discontinuation and downgrading can take place at any time prior to the submission of the thesis.

6.7. Requests for further information from the Dean

The Dean may request further information on any student and discuss his/her progress with the student, supervisor, DRS or HoD as necessary. The Dean may require the departmental RSPB to reconsider the situation of any student, and its progress decisions, where this seems necessary. In cases where the student(s) concerned is supervised by the Dean, or he/she serves on the Supervisory Panel, the Dean shall arrange for another Dean to act in any circumstances that depart from normal expectations.

7. Assessment

7.1. Nomination and appointment of examiners

When a student submits their Approval of Title Form, the department will be asked to nominate two examiners: one internal and one external, whose names have to be approved by the Dean.

When a student has been referred and one or more of the appointed examiners is no longer able to examine the student (for reasons such as leaving the university, relocation or death) the department will nominate an appropriate examiner for the consideration of the Dean, to take over the examination process and the examination will continue to schedule. Departments can seek approval for reasonable adjustments from the Dean.

7.2. Staff candidates

In the case of staff candidates the department must nominate three external examiners, two of whom will be appointed by the Dean.

7.3. Eligibility to be an internal examiner

The internal examiner for a research degree should be:

- a member of the academic or research staff of the University or Partner Institution;
- research active with appropriate expertise;
- normally have a degree, or equivalent, at the level at which they are being appointed to examine (if not a case as to their suitability needs to be made). A Professor with appropriate publications would be considered to be 'equivalent' and a case would not need to be made.

The internal examiner should not:

- have been the student's supervisor (main, joint or secondary) other than acting as a temporary supervisor for a period of up to a year but not in the final 12 months before submission of the thesis;
- have been a member of the Supervisory Panel during the final six months before submission of the thesis;
- have a professional or personal relationship with the student or the external examiner that might give rise to a conflict of interest;
- be the partner or a close relative of the supervisor (main, joint or secondary).

7.4. Eligibility to be an external examiner

The external examiner for a research degree should be:

- research active with appropriate expertise;
- normally employed in an HE institution (if not, including Emeritus Professors, a case as to their suitability needs to be made);
- a senior member of staff and/or an experienced examiner (if not, a senior and experienced internal examiner must be appointed);
- qualified to the level at which they are being appointed to examine (if not, a case as to their suitability needs to be made).

The external examiner should not:

- have been a former member of the academic staff or a student of the University or Partner Institution in the past five years;
- have been involved in the supervision of the student;

- have a professional or personal relationship with the student, the student's supervisor or the internal examiner that might give rise to a conflict of interest.

7.5. Role of the external examiner

The external examiner's duties are as follows:

- to read the thesis;
- to reach an independent judgment on the thesis, against the appropriate criteria for the award, without consulting the internal examiner about the assessment, and to record this on a Preliminary Report Form prior to the viva;
- to send their completed Preliminary Report Form to the Postgraduate Research Education Team at least one week prior to the viva;
- to attend the viva and viva pre-meeting;
- to come to an agreement with the internal examiner as to the outcome of the examination;
- with the internal examiner, to complete the Joint Report Form;
- in the case of a referral, normally to re-examine the referred thesis.

7.6. Role of the internal examiner

The internal examiner's duties are as follows:

- to read the thesis;
- to reach an independent judgment on the thesis, against the appropriate criteria for the award, without consulting the external examiner about the assessment, and to record this on a Preliminary Report Form prior to the viva;
- to send their completed Preliminary Report Form to the Postgraduate Research Education Team at least one week prior to the viva;
- to oversee the arrangements for the assessment process including liaising with the external examiner to set a date for the viva;
- to ensure that the department notifies the student of the date for the viva;
- to oversee the proceedings at the viva in accordance with University regulations and policies;
- to come to an agreement with the external examiner as to the outcome of the examination;
- with the external examiner, to complete the Joint Report Form;
- in the case of a pass with corrections, to notify the Postgraduate Research Education Team when they have received the corrected thesis from the candidate and to assess the corrected thesis within a reasonable time period. For minor corrections this should be within 2 weeks and for major corrections within one month of receiving the corrections from the candidate.
- in the case of a referral, normally to re-examine the referred thesis.

7.7. Timescale

The viva should normally be held no later than three months after the receipt of the thesis by the examiners.

7.8. Conduct of the viva

Both examiners should be present at the viva and are expected to follow the Guidelines on the Viva sent to them on appointment. The examiners should hold a pre-viva meeting to discuss their preliminary views on the thesis and to plan the viva. The candidate should be given the opportunity to defend the thesis. It will usually be necessary for the candidate to leave the room while the examiners confer as to the outcome of the examination and the candidate should then be told the result. Where it is not possible to conduct the viva face-to-face, permission must be requested from the Dean for the viva to be conducted via a video link/Skype in accordance with the University policy on the matter.

7.9. Independent Chair

In certain circumstances as contained in the University policy on the matter, the Dean may appoint an independent chair for the viva.

7.10. Reports and recommendations

Before the viva, the internal and external examiners must each complete, independently, a Preliminary Report Form giving their initial assessment of the thesis. These reports must be submitted to the Postgraduate Research Education Team at least one week prior to the viva who will then arrange for the exchange of the reports.

Following the viva, the examiners must complete a Joint Report Form, which records the outcome of the examination.

Candidates are entitled to receive copies of the examiners' pre and post viva reports on their thesis on request, when examining is complete.

7.11. Waiving the viva

FIRST SUBMISSION

Permission to waive a viva will only be granted by the Dean in exceptional circumstances. The Postgraduate Research Education Team would then notify the student of the examiners' wish not to hold a viva and the reasons for it, but they would be told that they have the right to have a viva if they wish.

REFERRED THESIS

Where the recommended outcome of the examination of a referred thesis is a pass, then a request by the examiners to waive the viva will normally be granted. Where the recommendation is not a pass then a request by the examiners to waive the viva will only be granted in exceptional circumstances. The Postgraduate Research Education Team would then notify the student of the examiners' request and the reasons for it, but they would be told that they have a right to have a viva if they wish.

7.12. Disagreement between examiners

When the examiners are unable to reach agreement on the outcome of the examination they shall record this on the Joint Report Form. A new internal and external examiner shall be appointed. The new examiners will be informed that the first examiners failed to reach a decision but will not be shown the preliminary reports. The new examiners will examine the thesis in the normal manner.

7.13. Suspected academic offences

If either of the examiners suspects an academic offence at any stage during the examination process they should notify the Postgraduate Research Education Team which will arrange for the matter to be investigated in accordance with the University's [Academic Offences Policy](#). The viva shall be suspended.

7.14 Student Appeals against an Examination Decision

Candidates may appeal the outcome of their examination. To do so they should consult the [Appeals Procedures for Postgraduate Research Students](#)

8. Information and Regulations available elsewhere

Your registration as a research student is governed by the Higher Degree Regulations. These can be found on the University website at:

Higher Degree Regulations

www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/regulations/regulations-higher.aspx

Academic Offences Procedure

www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/policies/academic-offences.aspx

Appeals Procedure for Research Degree Students

www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/policies/research-progress-appeals.aspx

Code of Practice on Teaching and Demonstrating by Graduate Students

<http://www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/regulations/codes-higher.aspx>

Code of Practice: Professional Doctorates

<http://www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/regulations/codes-higher.aspx>

Code of Practice for the Supervision of Masters' Dissertations

<http://www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/regulations/codes-higher.aspx>

Conduct of Research Degree Vivas by Video Link

<http://www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/regulations/codes-higher.aspx>

Data Protection and Research Activity

www.essex.ac.uk/records_management/policies/data_protection_and_research.aspx

Higher Degree Regulations: Examination of Staff Candidates

<http://www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/regulations/regulations-higher.aspx>

University of Essex Student Handbook

www.essex.ac.uk/student_handbook

University Regulations, Policy and Procedure

www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/regulations/default.aspx