University of Aberdeen

ACADEMIC QUALITY HANDBOOK

SECTION 8

RESEARCH STUDENTS

This Section of the Academic Quality Handbook should be of particular interest to research students, Supervisors and Heads of School

---

CONTENTS

Appendices

8.1　Introduction

8.1.1　The University Senate has ultimate responsibility for assuring the quality of its educational provision and the academic standards of its awards, but the powers prescribed under the various higher degree regulations are exercised on its behalf by the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC). The Committee has, in turn, delegated the day-to-day responsibility for several administrative functions to the Graduate Schools. The Graduate Schools, working alongside the Registry, deal with all administrative matters relating to the admission, progression and examination of individual research students. The QAC's remit is given in Appendix 3.3.

8.2　Admission and Appointment of Supervisor

8.2.1　Students can be registered for the following degrees by research:-

PhD (Doctor of Philosophy);
PhD (by Publication);
DPT (Doctor of Practical Theology)
EdD (Doctor of Education);
EngD (Doctor of Engineering);
MD (Doctor of Medicine);
MPhil (Master of Philosophy);
ChM (Master of Surgery);
MLE (Master of Land Economy);
LLM (Master of Laws);
MLitt (Master of Letters);
MSc (Master of Science);
MTh (Master of Theology);
MRes (Master of Research).

8.2.2　In addition, some students undertake research as a Registered Postgraduate Student (RPS). Their period of study is usually less than six months and there is no formal assessment. Transfer to a degree programme of longer duration may be recommended and backdated to the original start date, if appropriate, therefore the normal admissions process should be followed.

8.2.3　Details of the admission requirements and the minimum and maximum study period requirements are prescribed in the relevant regulations in the University Calendar, which can be accessed at http://www.abdn.ac.uk/registry/calendar/ .

8.2.4　Heads of School are responsible for considering applications for admission to a research degree and for recommending acceptance or rejection. Completed application forms should be submitted to SRAS [in the case of the Colleges of Life Sciences & Medicine and Physical Sciences via the Graduate School], indicating the Head of School's nomination of a supervisor(s) for the applicant, the period and mode of study, and any conditions to be satisfied prior to entry, where appropriate.

8.2.5　Students will be allocated a supervisor(s) upon admission to the University. He or she will be part of a supervisory team. A supervisory team will comprise more than one supervisor, working in co-supervision, always with one supervisor designated as lead. At least one member of the supervisory team must be a Professor, Reader or Lecturer of the University.

8.2.6   Appendix 8.1 outlines the postgraduate application procedure giving the approximate turn-around time of each stage of the application process.

8.3	**Code of Practice: Postgraduate Research Students**

8.3.1   A *Code of Practice: Postgraduate Research Students* (see Section 5, Appendix 5.4) was first approved in 1997 and is revised annually. It describes the responsibilities of Research Students, Supervisors, Heads of School, and Heads of Graduate School in relation to research student supervision. The Code does not state or replace regulations, but summarises the University's practice, and should be read in conjunction with this Section of the Academic Quality Handbook.

8.4	**Guidance and Support**

8.4.1   While the University's services and facilities relating to student guidance and learner support, which are described in Section 5, are available to all students, it is hoped that research students will develop a close working relationship with their supervisor(s) in terms of academic guidance and support. To foster this relationship, the University has put into place two mechanisms in regard to monitoring the progress of an individual research student and to ensure that, as far as possible, the thesis is submitted within the student's registration period. These mechanisms are described in paragraphs 8.4.2 and 8.4.3 below.

Monitoring Progress: Postgraduate Assessment Form

8.4.2   Since 1989 all research students have been subject to monitoring assessments to ascertain whether progress has been satisfactory. It is a requirement that research students are monitored on a bi-annual basis.

8.4.3   Assessment forms vary across the Colleges and will be circulated to supervisors for completion electronically or in hard copy by the relevant Graduate Schools. The assessment form should be completed by the Supervisor(s) and the student, and the Head of School, and returned to the relevant Graduate School.

8.4.4   It is a formal record of the student's progress and their generic skills training, and gives Supervisors, students and Heads of School an opportunity to comment on progress and supervision. It is thus very important that these forms are completed. Where a research student's progress is flagged as "unsatisfactory" in the bi-annual assessment form, Heads of School (or Heads of Graduate School in cases where supervisors are also the Head of School) would be contacted by the Graduate School and asked to meet with the student.

8.4.5   Students registered for research training programmes such as the MRes in Psychology are exempt from completing the assessment form as long as they are completing Student Course Evaluation Forms at the end of each course taken (Section 3, paragraph 3.5.4 refers).

Postgraduate Structured Management Framework

8.4.6   Generic *Postgraduate Structured Management Frameworks* were approved in 1997 for 36 month and 60 month PhD programmes and for other research degrees in 2000, (Appendices 8.2 to 8.7 respectively).   Generic Frameworks for 42 and 48 month full-time PhD programmes were approved in 2013. It is intended that Schools and Colleges should modify the Frameworks to suit their needs, while retaining a core element to ensure consistency of quality supervisory practice. The *Frameworks* have three components:-

- development of a strong interactive relationship between the research student and supervisor(s);
- monitoring of the research student's progress and supervisor performance at the School level by the Head of School;
- ensuring the quality assurance of postgraduate progress, education, training and development across Schools by a University-wide monitoring system.

Researcher Development Unit

8.4.7   The Researcher Development Unit supports personal, professional and career development of postgraduate research students and research staff at all stages of their career. The Researcher Development unit works closely with Colleges and the Public Engagement with Research Unit and supports a progressive strategy for development closely coupled to follow through activities.

Monitoring of Postgraduate Research Degree Provision: Student Feedback

8.4.8   In alternate years, the University operates either the Higher Education Academy (HEA) Postgraduate Research Student Survey (PRES) or an annual on-line questionnaire to help the University enhance the quality of postgraduate research degree provision. Information arising from the questionnaires is considered by the Postgraduate Committee and Heads of Graduate Schools, and discussed with individual Schools.

Problems and Difficulties

8.4.9   While the University aims to provide a welcoming and supportive environment for the conduct of research studies by postgraduate students, occasionally students will encounter academic problems and difficulties. The procedure for dealing with these is detailed in the *Code of Practice: Postgraduate Research Students* (Section 5 refers).

Research Student Administration

8.4.10 Research students and supervisors are directed to Section 6 of the Academic Quality Handbook which describes in detail practical issues and procedures relating to academic administration.

8.5	Taught Elements of Research Programmes

8.5.1   Various induction programmes are arranged for research students by their School and/or the College. In some Colleges, such programmes are compulsory for research students. Where courses are credit-rated and have formal assessment, candidates who successfully achieve 60 or 120 credit points are entitled to apply for the award of a Postgraduate Certificate or Postgraduate Diploma in Research Methods respectively. Regulation 8 for Research Degrees applies. Full-time students completing an MRes programme prior to undertaking a PhD will be registered for four years of study (1+3 programme).

8.5.2   One feature of the Postgraduate Structured Management Framework is a training needs analysis. Research students may be required by their Supervisor to attend taught courses relating specifically to their research training and development, which may be stipulated as a condition of entry.

8.6	**Examination (Appendix 8.8 also refers)**

Preparation and Submission of Theses

8.6.1   The thesis is expected to form a coherent whole with a consistent argument or series of arguments running through it. The incorporation of material published by the candidate during the period of registration for the degree is permitted but it must be accompanied by written commentary on publications submitted. Furthermore, the footnoting/end noting must make clear which sections of the thesis are based on published material and how much individual responsibility the candidate has for any jointly authored work. Such material must be property and stylistically incorporated into the thesis.

8.6.2   Notes on the presentation of theses are produced by the Library. They can be accessed at   https://www.abdn.ac.uk/library/documents/guides/gen/qggen009.pdf   The Notes include information on upper word limits of thesis length. Also see the relevant regulations in the University Calendar at:- www.abdn.ac.uk/registry/calendar/postgraduate

8.6.3   Students should inform the Registry of their intention to submit their thesis by completing an Intention to Submit Form (available at www.abdn.ac.uk/infohub/study/changes-to-studies.php). This form should be submitted at least one month before the intended date to the Infohub. By doing this, it is anticipated that examiners will be appointed by the time the thesis is submitted and the thesis can be sent out for examination straight away. If the Intention to Submit Form is not submitted prior to submission of the thesis there will be a delay in the thesis being sent out for examination whilst examiners are appointed.

Nomination and Appointment of Examiners

8.6.4   The Court and Senate have delegated to the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) the power to approve the appointment of examiners for higher degrees examined by thesis and oral examination.

8.6.5   Once research students submit to the Registry the relevant form to intimate their intention of submitting a thesis or other work for a higher degree, the Registry formally requests the relevant Head of School to nominate internal and external examiners by sending a Nomination of Examiners form for completion (available at www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/teaching/postgraduate-research-1681.php).   In identifying examiners, Heads of School are expected to liaise with the candidate's supervisor and indicate reasons for proposing the external examiner. Any contact between a candidate and the nominated external examiner during the candidate's career should also be indicated.

8.6.6   If a candidate is a full- or part-time member of the academic staff in the University, at least two external examiners must be appointed in addition to an internal moderator. In all other cases, normally one internal examiner and one external examiner is nominated.

8.6.7   In submitting nominations, Heads of School are reminded of the following:-

- an internal examiner should be appointed for all higher degrees examined by thesis. In those instances where it is necessary for two or more external examiners to be appointed (e.g. when the candidate is a member of academic staff), the internal moderator's responsibility is to oversee the examination and, in particular, to ensure that standard University procedures and policies are followed. The internal moderator, if required, is not appointed to examine the thesis and, as such, is not permitted to sign

the examiners reports on the thesis or to certify that the minor corrections have been made to the examiners satisfaction

- a candidate's supervisor (past or present) cannot be appointed as an internal examiner;
- a member of an associated research institute who holds a University of Aberdeen appointment may be appointed as an internal examiner;
- a former member of staff who has left the University since a candidate completed his/her research may be appointed as an *internal* examiner and offered the same fee as an external examiner;
- in all other cases an internal examiner or moderator must be a contracted employee of the University (excludes honorary members of staff);
- where the examiners appointed do not include a contracted employee of the University, a moderator should be appointed to oversee the examination arrangements;
- Heads of School should identify on the nomination form those theses where confidentiality might appropriately apply. As part of the appointment process, the attention of the external examiner will be drawn to this matter by the Registry. It is expected that the imposition of confidentiality restrictions be used only exceptionally;
- If the candidate is employed as a Research Fellow or Research Assistant at the University then two externals do not need to be appointed, unless recommended by the Head of School.

8.6.8 Heads of School are also asked to ensure that the proposed internal and external examiners are aware that they are being nominated. Students should submit to the Infohub two bound copies of their thesis for examination.

Oral Examination

8.6.9 It is University policy that all candidates for the award of a higher degree by research should be required to submit to oral examination unless there are exceptional reasons why the oral examination should be dispensed with. In such cases, the exceptional reasons should be given in detail on the examiners' Joint Report Form (see below) and should be approved by the Quality Assurance Committee **prior** to processing of the result.

8.6.10 It is the responsibility of the internal examiner (or internal moderator) to make the arrangements for the oral examination. Oral examinations normally take place in Aberdeen but may be held elsewhere by the mutual agreement of all the examiners and the candidate. Supervisors and/or Heads of School may attend oral examinations only at the invitation of the examiners and with the agreement of the candidate.

8.6.11 The oral examination should normally take place within two months of the date of dispatch of the candidate's thesis to the examiners. The internal examiner (or internal moderator) should keep the candidate and the Registry fully informed if there are any delays in regard to the oral examination.

8.7	**Examiners' Reports**

8.7.1 Examiners are required to submit two reports. Each examiner is required to prepare an independent written report on their assessment of the thesis on the Independent Report Form. This must be prepared independently <u>before</u> the day of the oral examination. A Joint Report Form indicating the joint recommendation of the examiners and containing details of the oral examination must be submitted <u>after</u> the oral examination along with a list of any required corrections.

8.7.2   Independent and Joint Reports should normally be submitted to the Graduate School immediately after the oral examination and within three days at the latest. The Independent and Joint Reports will only be made available to candidates if the Examiners grant their permission.

8.7.3   The examiners' recommendation (see below) is considered by a member of the Quality Assurance Committee who has delegated power to recommend to the Senate, on behalf of the Quality Assurance Committee, whether a thesis be sustained and the relevant degree be conferred or whether the thesis be referred or failed.

8.7.4   Where a thesis is referred the reason must be provided. For re-submission the examiners must give details of any conditions (paragraph 8.8.1 refers).

8.7.5   Where the recommendation by examiners is that the thesis be sustained, subject to minor corrections, the internal examiner is normally appointed by the examiners to ensure that the required corrections are made satisfactorily.

8.7.6   Schools should be aware that the Data Protection Act 1998[1] entitles postgraduate research students to copies of their examiner's reports (Section 1.12 refers).

8.8	Re-Submission

8.8.1   Where the examiners recommend that the thesis be not sustained but that the candidate be given the opportunity to re-submit in a revised form, this should be within a stated period not exceeding 12 months. Examiners making this recommendation are required to submit to the Registry, in writing, their major comments on which the revised submission is to be based, which will be sent to the candidate. The candidates should consult with his or her supervisor when revising the thesis. The candidate and the examiners should not be in contact during this time. On re-submission, a copy of the comments will be sent to the examiners with the revised thesis by the Registry.

8.8.2   Where the recommendation by examiners that the thesis does not meet the requirements for the degree being examined but meets the standards (as defined by the Regulations) of a lower award, they may recommend that the lower degree be awarded. However, it should be noted that there is a recognised difference in standard between the degree of MPhil and other Master's degrees relating to the length of the period of research and the level of research work undertaken, details of which are contained in the relevant sections of the regulations for higher degrees (Appendix 8.8, refers).

8.8.3   Unless there are exceptional circumstances, the same examiners would be appointed automatically to examine such re-submissions.

8.8.4   The Regulations do not permit a thesis to be examined more than twice and therefore only one re-submission is permitted.

8.9	Progress and Academic Appeals

8.9.1   Research student progress is monitored formally through bi-annual assessment forms (paragraph 8.4.2 refers). Research students who have any concerns about their progress

---

[1] www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/29/contents

should discuss these with their supervisor as soon as possible. If still dissatisfied, they should approach their Head of School.

Academic Appeals

8.9.2   From time to time a research student may seek to appeal against a decision involving academic judgement taken, in terms of the Regulations for the degree or other qualification for which he or she is studying, including termination of studies or the outcome of their degree examination(s). Specific rights of appeal are very limited indeed but the Senate has a general duty to regulate and superintend the teaching of the University, and the Court has the authority to review any decision of the Senate which may be appealed against by a member of the University. For details of the University's appeals procedures see Appendix 5.18.

8.10   Complaints and Discipline

Complaints

8.10.1   The University's procedures for student complaints on academic and non-academic matters are described in Sections 5.25 and 5.26 and Appendix 5.19 also refer.

Student Discipline

8.10.2   Disciplinary procedures are set out in the University's Code of Practice on Student Discipline. See Appendix 5.15 to Section 5.

Examination Offences (including plagiarism)

8.10.3   Where there is reason to believe that cheating in a prescribed degree assessment has occurred a complaint should normally be made through the Head of the appropriate School; it should not be dealt with as part of academic assessment. The role of the internal and external examiners shall be restricted to the presentation of evidence; they shall have no role in deciding whether a student is guilty of cheating. They may, as appropriate, submit evidence to a disciplinary hearing. The Head of the School shall normally investigate the allegation with the student by following the procedures detailed in Code of Practice on Student Discipline.

8.10.4   For the purposes of the Code, cheating includes plagiarism: it is defined in the Code as:-

"Plagiarism is the use, without adequate acknowledgment, of the intellectual work of another person in work submitted for assessment. A student cannot be found to have committed plagiarism where it can be shown that the student has taken all reasonable care to avoid representing the work of others as his or her own (Section 2.1.1(h) of the Code refers)."

8.11   Graduation

8.11.1   Students who successfully complete a programme of study must make an application to the Registry in order for their award to be conferred. Details of when and how to apply to

attend ceremonies in-person or graduation *in* absentia are available on the Graduation website[2]. .

---

[2] www.abdn.ac.uk/graduation