

Academic Quality and Standards

Postgraduate Research Degrees Code of Practice

Version:	1.0
Type:	Regulations
Approved by:	Senate
Owner:	Academic & Registry Services
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Effective from:	17 September 2025
Next review:	June 2028

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1. Introduction

This Code of Practice sets out the operational framework for postgraduate research (PGR) degrees awarded by the University. Forming part of the University's academic governance structure, it has the status of regulations for research degree candidates, supervisors, examiners and professional services staff.

1.1. Scope of the Code of Practice

The Code applies to all University awards classified as postgraduate research degrees listed in the Academic Regulations, subject to the following:

1.1.1. Professional Doctorates

This Code applies to modules delivered as part of Professional Doctorate courses, where those modules are designated as 'research'. The Modular Courses Assessment Regulations applies to modules that are designated as 'taught'.

1.1.2. Master by Research

This Code does not apply to courses leading to the award of Master by Research. The Modular Courses Assessment Regulations apply to the entirety of these courses.

1.2. Application of the Code of Practice

This Code applies to all research degree candidates registered with the University, regardless of mode or location of study. It is also applicable to all members of staff concerned with the delivery and administration of PGR courses.

The provisions set out in this Code apply from the point of first registration through to the award or termination of registration, including periods of suspension or extension. Where collaborative or joint supervision arrangements are in place, this Code continues to apply unless an approved alternative has been formally agreed.

Where the University makes awards jointly with another institution, the terms of the formal collaboration agreement will specify whether this Code or the equivalent document of the partner institution takes precedence.

1.3. Key Roles and Responsibilities

Throughout this Code, reference will be made to key individuals and bodies involved in the delivery and oversight of postgraduate research degrees. These include:

- **Principal Supervisor.** The main academic supervisor responsible for the candidate's overall progress, project planning, skills development, and adherence to academic regulations. Must be a contracted member of academic staff and the primary point of contact for the students.

- **Secondary Supervisor.** Provides academic or pastoral support and complements the Principal Supervisor. May be internal or, with approval, external to the University.
- **Supervisory team.** The combination of Principal and Secondary Supervisors appointed to support and oversee the candidate's research project.
- **Head of Division.** Holds formal responsibility for assigning and overseeing supervisory teams, approving changes to supervision or registration, and maintaining standards within the Division.
- **School PGR Tutor.** Provides academic oversight and pastoral support within Schools, supports annual monitoring processes, and contributes to the development of policy and practice according to the published role descriptor.
- **Faculty PGR Tutor.** Has overall responsibility for PGR matters including appointment of assessors and chairs, policy implementation, and formal decision-making under delegated authority according to the published role descriptor.
- **Independent Assessor.** A trained academic, independent of the supervisory team, who reviews student progress during annual progress monitoring and contributes to progression decisions.
- **Independent Chair.** Oversees the conduct of viva examinations, ensuring fairness and adherence to policy. Must not contribute to the academic judgement of the research project output under examination.
- **Examiners.** Are responsible for examining doctoral theses, or equivalent research output, and for making a recommendation on the outcome of their assessment following the viva.
- **Postgraduate Research Programmes Subcommittee.** A subcommittee of the Senate's Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee, responsible for the governance, monitoring and enhancement of postgraduate research provision across the University.

2. Admissions and Registration

This section outlines the University's requirements and processes for admitting postgraduate research students, the terms of their registration, and the procedures for suspending, extending, or amending that registration. This section must be read with reference to the University's Admissions Policy.

2.1. Admissions Requirements

Applicants for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) will normally be expected to hold an upper second-class honours degree or a lower second-class honours degree with a relevant Master's qualification. First or second degrees should be in a discipline that is congruent with their intended area of research. In exceptional cases, applicants with significant relevant professional experience may be admitted without a Master's qualification.

Applicants for professional doctorates must demonstrate professional standing and substantial experience in a relevant field. They must also be able to access a suitable practice environment throughout their studies. Specific course entry requirements are outlined in Course Specifications.

Applicants who require a visa to study in the United Kingdom must also demonstrate proficiency in the English language. The required level will be specified in the University's Admissions Policy which applies to all research degree programmes.

A formal interview is required for applicants prior to an offer being made.

2.2. Registration

Students may register on a full-time or part-time basis. The University operates three standard registration points per academic year. The registration mode and point of entry are determined at the point of offer.

2.3. Duration of Registration

The standard registration periods for research degrees are:

Award	Mode	Minimum period before submission	Maximum period before submission	Maximum duration of registration
PhD	FT	2 years	3 years + 1 year write up	10 years
	PT	4 years	6 years + 1 year write up	10 years
MPhil	FT	1 year	3 years	8 years
	PT	2 years	6 years	8 years
Prof. Doc.	FT	2 years	3 years + 1 write up year	10 years
	PT	4 years	6 years + 1 write up year	10 years

The durations include the minimum period following initial registration before a thesis (or equivalent) may be submitted, the maximum period in which a student is expected to submit without requiring an extension, and the overall maximum duration of registration allowed.

The maximum period before submission represents the number of years a student may be in active study, excluding any approved interruptions or periods spent preparing a resubmission. Students are expected to submit their thesis (or equivalent) within this timeframe. If necessary, this period may be extended by formal application and approval.

2.4. Suspension and Extension of Registration

Students may be able to adjust their period of registration through suspensions or extensions where there is good cause for doing so.

2.4.1. Suspension of registration

Students may request a suspension of studies if personal, medical, or professional circumstances temporarily prevent engagement with their research. Requests must be made using the appropriate University form and must be supported by relevant evidence. Suspensions are normally granted in whole months only and are typically limited to a maximum of 12 months.

Suspension of studies does not automatically extend the overall registration period. A suspension may only be granted if it does not cause the student to exceed the maximum period of registration, unless an exceptional extension is approved by the Associate Dean for PGR Studies and the Deputy Academic Registrar.

Suspension of studies normally takes effect from the date that the appropriate authorisation has been given. Backdating is permitted only in exceptional circumstances and for reasonable periods of time.

Students do not accrue fees during approved periods of suspension but remain liable for any fees already accrued before the suspension period begins.

2.4.2. Extension of registration

Students may also apply for an extension to their maximum submission date. This must be supported by evidence and submitted using the appropriate form. Extensions are normally granted once only, and for no more than 12 months. Any request to extend the overall registration period requires exceptional approval by the Chair of PGR Programmes Subcommittee.

Students granted extensions to their submission period or maximum registration period continue to be liable for fees at the appropriate rate for their mode of study.

2.5. Changes to Registration

Students may request changes to their registration status, including mode of study (full-time to part-time or vice versa), programme of study, or supervisory

arrangements. All such requests must be submitted using the appropriate forms and supported by a clear justification.

Requests to change mode of attendance must demonstrate good reason. Academic & Registry Services will calculate new minimum and maximum submission periods based on the proportion of time already completed. These calculations are made in whole months and recorded on the central student record. In addition, fee rates may change when students transfer between modes of attendance. Calculations will be based on the proportion of the academic year completed and students will be notified of any changes to their fee liability.

Requests to change supervisory arrangements must be submitted to the Head of Division or their nominee, who is responsible for assigning the supervisory team and approving any revisions.

Students must inform the University of any changes to their contact details or personal circumstances which may impact their registration or progress.

2.6. Pending Statuses

Full-time students who have completed 3 years of active study, and part-time students who have completed 6 years of active study, will be automatically assigned Submission Pending Status.

Submission pending status attracts a reduced fee and is valid for one year. Whilst on this status students are not subject to annual progress monitoring, but their access to facilities and supervision may be limited and they will not normally continue data collection or experimental work. If students do not submit their thesis within 12 months of active study after they have been assigned submission pending status, they will revert to paying full fees for their course.

2.6.1. Resubmission pending status

Students required to revise and resubmit their thesis (or equivalent research output) are automatically transferred to resubmission pending status. This status lasts for one year and attracts the same reduced fee as submission pending status. Students on resubmission pending status are not subject to annual progress monitoring.

2.7. Withdrawal and Discontinuation

Students may voluntarily withdraw from a postgraduate research degree course or may have their studies discontinued by the University.

2.7.1. Voluntary withdrawal

Students may withdraw from their course at any time by following the process administered by Academic & Registry Services. Students who voluntarily withdraw are entitled to a *pro-rata* reimbursement of tuition fees paid for the year in which their registration is ended. Research support fees (bench fees) are not reimbursed.

Students who voluntarily withdraw may be permitted to resume the same programme of research following an assessment by the relevant Faculty PGR Tutor, in consultation with the Principal Supervisor. This assessment will determine the validity and currency of the research project before permitting resumption. Students reinstated in this way are treated as if they have been on a period of suspension and do not benefit from additional time following reinstatement.

Reinstatement is not permitted if a student has exceeded, or is close to exceeding, their maximum submission period or maximum period of registration. However, such students may reapply for a new course without advanced standing.

2.7.2. Discontinuation

The University may discontinue (terminate) a student's studies for breach of regulations or policies, including:

- Unsatisfactory academic progress (following the procedures outlined in section 5);
- Non-payment of fees after due warning;
- Serious misconduct or breach of University policies;
- Failure to engage with annual progress monitoring processes;
- Non-compliance with registration requirements.

Students whose studies are discontinued by the University are not entitled to any fee refund, though the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research & Innovation) may authorise a refund in exceptional circumstances.

Students who wish to appeal against the discontinuation of their studies will be able to use the Academic Appeals Policy (if discontinuation was for academic reasons) or the review mechanism of another policy.

2.8. International Student Visa Implications

Students studying in the United Kingdom on a student visa must comply with the requirements of their visa and the procedures set out by the University regarding absences.

2.8.1. Engagement requirements

Students on student visas must maintain continuous engagement with their research programme and supervisory team. Failure to engage for extended periods may result in reporting to the Home Office which may result in visa curtailment.

Students should seek advice from the Student Visa Compliance team before making any decisions that might affect their visa status, including requests for suspension, changes to mode of study, or withdrawal from their course.

2.8.2. Suspension of Studies

The University must report any suspension of studies by student visa holders to the Home Office. This will result in the visa being curtailed and the individual required to leave the UK. It is the student's responsibility to make an application for a new visa before the end of the period of suspension if they wish to return to the UK to resume their studies.

2.8.3. Withdrawal and discontinuation of studies

If a student on a student visa ceases to engage with their course or has their studies discontinued, the University is required to report their withdrawal to the Home Office. Under such circumstances, the student would be required to leave the UK unless they have alternative immigration status.

3. Supervision

This section sets out how supervision is arranged, the responsibilities of supervisors and students, and the processes for addressing changes or concerns.

3.1. Supervisory Teams

All postgraduate research students must be supported by a supervisory team consisting of:

- One Principal Supervisor, who is the main point of contact and carries primary responsibility;
- At least one Secondary Supervisor, who may contribute to academic or pastoral support.

In all circumstances, the Principal Supervisor must be a contracted member of the University's academic staff. All Supervisors must be on the University's Accredited PGR Supervisor List. External Secondary Supervisors are permitted, subject to approval and in compliance with PGR External Supervisor Policy.

3.2. Appointment and Oversight

Supervisors are appointed by the Head of Division (or nominee), who is responsible for ensuring the team has the relevant expertise and capacity. Where appropriate, a mentor may be appointed to support new supervisory teams.

Supervision input is recorded as a percentage split in the central records system. The Principal Supervisor must account for at least 40%, or 50% if there are only two supervisors.

No total individual's supervisory responsibility should be more than the full-time equivalent (FTE) of 6 PGR students or 12 actual individual students, whichever number is reached first. (E.g. a student supervised at 80%, if full time, counts as 0.8FTE or, if part-time, as 0.4FTE). Workloads must, however, be discussed with and agreed by relevant line managers such as Head of Division or Head of School.

3.3. Supervisor Eligibility

To be appointed as a Principal Supervisor, an individual must :

- Hold a doctoral qualification;
- Be research active or a recognised expert practitioner;
- Have prior supervision experience.

To be appointed as a Secondary Supervisor, an individual must normally:

- Hold a doctoral qualification;
- Be a subject specialist who is currently research active, with a publication record that includes both recently published work and work in progress, or be involved in ongoing research projects; OR
- Be an expert practitioner with appropriate professional experience in a relevant field, hold a senior position, and be involved in ongoing research projects.

All supervisors must complete University training before appointment and refresh it at least every three years. Heads of Division approve applications to be added to the Accredited PGR Supervisor List.

3.4. Supervisor Responsibilities

Principal and Secondary Supervisors share responsibility for:

- Establishing and maintaining regular meetings with the student;
- Advising on academic and pastoral matters;
- Assisting with ethical approvals and research integrity;
- Participating in annual progress monitoring;
- Providing timely, constructive feedback on written work;
- Ensuring the student is prepared for submission and viva examination.

The Principal Supervisor also takes the lead in:

- Project planning and skills audit;
- Induction and researcher development planning;
- Liaising with Academic & Registry Services and Faculty governance structures.

3.5. Student Responsibilities

Students are responsible for:

- Regularly attending and making a record of supervisory meetings;
- Taking ownership of their research project and progress;
- Complying with University policies and ethical standards;
- Engaging with the Researcher Development Plan;
- Preparing for submission and examination in a timely manner.

3.6. Supervision Meetings

Full-time students must meet with their principal supervisor at least monthly. Part-time students must meet their principal supervisor at least once every two months. At least one full supervisory team meeting must be held once a year, but it is recommended that these whole teams meetings take place termly, especially where second supervisors have 20% responsibility for supervision or more. Students are required to make a record of the content of the discussions that take place in supervision meetings and share these with supervisors. Supervisors are required to maintain accurate records of the meetings they have held.

3.7. Changes to Supervision

Requests to change a supervisor must be made in writing and submitted to the Head of Division or nominee. The University will make reasonable efforts to accommodate such changes.

3.8. Resolving Difficulties

Students who experience issues with their supervision should first raise them informally with their supervisor(s). If this is not possible or does not resolve the issue, concerns should be escalated to the Head of Division or the Faculty PGR Tutor. Formal complaints can be made using the University's Student Complaints Procedure or the Dignity and Respect Policy where relevant.

Supervisors with concerns about a student's engagement or conduct should seek advice from Academic & Registry Services.

4. Research Environment and Responsibilities

This section outlines the expectations placed on the University, faculties, schools, and students to ensure a supportive and appropriately resourced research environment.

4.1. Responsibilities of the University

The University will:

- Maintain clear policies and procedures governing research degrees, regularly reviewed and approved by the Senate or its committees;
- Provide access to training, guidance, and research development opportunities through a University-wide research training framework;
- Monitor the quality of provision through annual review, external feedback, and strategic oversight by the Postgraduate Research Programmes Subcommittee;
- Ensure compliance with research ethics, integrity and governance standards;
- Support access to appropriate resources, including IT, library services, and research infrastructure;
- Coordinate a University-wide induction for PGR students;
- Ensure students receive regular communications from the University about our research culture and environment;
- Work in collaboration with Chester Students' Union to collect and respond to student feedback;

4.2. Responsibilities of Faculties and Schools

Each Faculty or, where appropriately devolved, School, will:

- Ensure students are inducted into the local research environment, including access to facilities, health and safety, and training opportunities;
- Monitor the availability and suitability of supervision teams and research resources;
- Provide clear lines of communication and pastoral support, including appointing Faculty and School PGR Tutors;
- Coordinate local events that promote the integration of students into the research community;
- Maintain records of student progress, supervision, and research training.

4.3. Responsibilities of Students

Students are expected to:

- Engage fully with the research environment, including engaging with University resources and infrastructure to support research;
- Attend and contribute to relevant University and disciplinary seminars, workshops, conferences and peer networks;
- Use University facilities responsibly and comply with health and safety policies;
- Take ownership of their research development, including maintaining a current Researcher Development Plan or equivalent;
- Seek guidance from their supervisors and support services where needed;
- Contribute to the research culture of their faculty and school, where opportunities exist.

- It is expected, as part of annual progress monitoring, that all students will be able to evidence engagement with a research community through presenting their research, publishing their research or actively participating in research seminars or professional doctorate study activities.

4.4. Researcher Development Plan

All students must complete a Researcher Development Plan (RDP) or equivalent within the first three months of registration (or six months for part-time students), in consultation with their supervisors. The plan should be:

- Reviewed and updated annually;
- Informed by a training needs analysis and skills audit;
- Available at the time of Annual Progress Monitoring;

Support for developing the RDP or equivalent is provided through University research training provision and the supervisory team.

4.5. Research Culture

The University promotes a collegial, inclusive, and collaborative research culture. Faculties, Schools and Divisions are expected to foster:

- Opportunities for students to present and discuss research;
- Engagement with discipline-specific and interdisciplinary research communities;
- A culture of mutual respect, academic freedom, and responsible conduct in research.

5. Progress Monitoring and Review

This section outlines how the University monitors academic progress for all MPhil and PhD students and all Professional Doctorate students undertaking modules designated as “research”. The approach is designed to be straightforward, supportive, and clearly understood by students and staff.

5.1. Annual Progress Monitoring Reviews

Each research student undergoes formal monitoring once per academic year, aligned with the anniversary of their registration date or their return from a suspension of studies (whichever is later). This applies to MPhil and PhD students from the start of their studies. For students on Professional Doctorates, it takes place once students are registered on modules designated as “research”.

Annual Progress Monitoring Reviews happen annually, irrespective of whether a student is full-time or part-time. A two-month window either side of the anniversary applies to allow flexibility in timing and the reviews are co-ordinated by Faculty Research & Innovation Teams who share outcomes with the student and Registry Services.

Progress monitoring does not take place:

- During a period of approved suspension.
- While the student is registered under 'submission pending' status.
- While the student is undertaking a resubmission following examination.

The Annual Monitoring Progress Review is a desk-based exercise and comprises of:

- **A Student Report:** The student completes a written report summarising their progress over the previous 12 months and identifying any concerns or barriers;
- **Supervisor/Student Review:** This should summarise a discussion between students and supervisors outlining any actions they will take to enhance supervision practices (for both supervisor and student) moving forward;
- **Supervisor Commentary:** The Principal Supervisor provides written commentary and a recommendation regarding the student's progress;
- **Independent Review:** The completed report is reviewed by one Independent Assessor (not involved in supervision), who must determine:
 - That the student is making satisfactory progress; or
 - That there are concerns about progress (which should be detailed in the report); or
 - That the student is not making satisfactory progress.

If the student is making satisfactory progress, the monitoring cycle ends for that year and no further action is required.

If there are concerns about progress, these should be outlined explicitly in the report and progress against those concerns should be monitored in supervision. Supervisors should comment on progress made against those concerns at the next Annual Progress Monitoring review.

If the student is not making satisfactory progress, a formal Progress Review Meeting is convened.

5.1.1. Annual Progress Monitoring Meetings

While Annual Progress Monitoring happens as a desk-based exercise in most instances, it is expected that the Review process outlined above will be replaced by an Annual Progress Monitoring Meeting at the following points:

- 24 months for full-time students;
- 48 months for part-time students.

This meeting will use the same form to review progress as the one used for all other Annual Progress Monitoring. This meeting can take place face-to-face or online. The meeting shall be attended by:

- The MPhil or PhD student;
- The Supervisory Team where possible (minimally the Principal Supervisor);
- Two Independent Assessors.

At this meeting, students will provide a 10-15 minute presentation to the supervisors and two independent assessors, outlining their research questions, progress to date, and details of their argument/thesis as it has developed at the point of review. Students should also submit a written piece of work for review by the assessors in advance of the meeting. This should not be longer than 10,000 words. Based on the presentation, written submission, review form, and any questions/ discussion pertaining to the written work and presentation, the independent assessors, in a discussion without the supervisors or student present, are jointly responsible for making one of the following decisions:

- That the student is making satisfactory progress; or
- That there are concerns about progress (which should be detailed in the report); or
- That the student is not making satisfactory progress.

If the student is making satisfactory progress, the monitoring cycle ends for that year, and no further action is required.

If there are concerns about progress, these should be outlined explicitly in the report and progress against those concerns should be monitored in supervision. Supervisors should comment on progress made against those concerns at the next Annual Progress Monitoring review.

If the student is not making satisfactory progress, a formal Progress Review Meeting is convened.

5.2. Progress Review Meetings

First Progress Review Meeting

Where required, the Progress Review Meeting is, in the first instance, a structured opportunity to:

- Identify any barriers to progress;
- Clarify expectations for the next phase of study;
- Agree specific steps to help the student return to positive academic standing.

The meeting is attended by the student, their supervisors, and two Independent Assessors. Independent Assessors may ask to see a sample of student's work (usually not more than 10,000 words in length) to assist in their determination about the

outcome of the meeting. Following the review discussion, the Independent Assessors, in a separate discussion without the student or supervisors present, must determine one of the following outcomes:

- That the student is making satisfactory progress and the monitoring cycle is complete;
- That the student is permitted to continue, but specific recommendations or requirements are recorded in writing to support improved progress (e.g. training, targets, follow-up supervision). Progress against these recommendations are monitored through supervision and reported on at the next Annual Progress Monitoring Review;
- That the student is not making satisfactory progress and should undergo a further period of review with clear targets and expectations set out for that second review.

All recommendations and required actions must be recorded formally using the Annual Progress Review Form. While supervisors and students contribute to this meeting, the final decision on the outcome of the meeting is with the Independent Academic Assessors alone. Their reports should be sent to the Research & Innovation Teams in the student's faculty for dissemination to student and supervisors. R&I Teams also report outcomes to Registry Services.

Where a PGR student is determined not to be making satisfactory progress in the first Progress Review Meeting, it is imperative that a clear explanation is provided as to the reasons for the assessment and that clear information is provided about what must be done to improve. This should include:

- Clear guidance on the requirements for improvement, with SMART objectives/goals and/or milestones;
- Clear guidance about what the potential outcomes could be of the next review meeting;
- An explicit time/date for the next review meeting, which should give sufficient time for the required progress to be made. Normally this would not more than 3 months for a full-time student and 6 months for a part-time student;
- Students should receive appropriate academic support and guidance to support them to achieve the required improvements;
- If necessary, students should be referred to ASk, Student Services or Disability Services for support outside the supervisory team.

Second Progress Review Meeting (where required)

Where a student has not been deemed to be making satisfactory progress at a Progress Review Meeting, a second meeting should be held to establish whether the student has met the targets set at the first Progress Review Meeting. The second Progress Review Meeting will normally involve the same Independent Assessors as the first meeting, though this may not always be possible. At the second Progress Review Meeting, assessors must determine one of the following outcomes:

- That the student is making satisfactory progress and the monitoring cycle is complete;
- That there are serious unresolved concerns about progress, and the matter should be referred to a PGR Progress Panel.

5.3. University PGR Progress Panel Referral

Where serious concerns remain following two Progress Review Meetings, the case is referred to a University PGR Progress Panel, which has the authority to:

- Permit continuation (with or without conditions).
- Set a final opportunity to improve.
- Downgrade a student to MPhil from PhD (with no entitlement to reapply for upgrade).
- Terminate registration.

Membership and Appointment of the PGR Progress Panel.

The PGR Progress Panel is convened within the relevant faculty by the Faculty PGR Tutor and comprises:

- The Chair of the Postgraduate Research Subcommittee (or their nominee) as Chair of the Panel.
- Two members of academic staff from the same Faculty as the student but who have not been involved in the student's supervision.
- A member of the relevant Faculty Research & Knowledge Exchange team, who acts as Secretary to the Panel.

The student's Principal Supervisor is also invited to attend the meeting to provide contextual information but is not a member of the Panel and does not participate in the decision-making process.

The two faculty-based panel members are appointed by the Faculty PGR Tutor and must be independent of the supervisory team and any prior formal monitoring outcomes involving the student.

5.4 Appointment and Role of Independent Assessors

Independent Assessors are responsible for reviewing the student's Annual Progress Report and participating in Progress Review Meetings (as required and outlined above). They are appointed by the Head of Division, in consultation with the Faculty PGR Tutor.

To be eligible, an Independent Assessor must:

- Be on the University's Accredited PGR Supervisor List;
- Not be part of the student's current or past supervisory team;
- Have sufficient expertise to make an informed judgement on progress;
- Have completed the University's training for assessors, refreshed every three years.
- Not be a potential internal examiner for the final Annual Progress Review Meeting prior to submission.

Divisions must avoid conflicts of interest when appointing assessors and should rotate assessors annually where possible to ensure fairness and independence.

6. Research Ethics and Governance

This section outlines the University's expectations regarding the ethical conduct and governance of postgraduate research.

6.1. Ethical Principles

All postgraduate research must be conducted in accordance with the University's Research Ethics Policy outlined in the [Code of Practice for Research](#). Students are responsible for ensuring that their research upholds:

- Integrity, honesty, and accountability;
- Respect for the rights, dignity and safety of participants;
- Compliance with legal and professional standards.

6.2. Ethical Review Process

Before starting their research project, the student and supervisory team must complete an analysis of ethical considerations. If ethical approval is required, the student must follow the procedures set out in the Code of Practice for Research .

6.3. Faculty Research Ethics Committees

Each Faculty operates a Research Ethics Committee (FREC), or equivalent body, to review and approve research proposals. Application procedures, guidance and deadlines are published on the relevant Faculty Portal page.

The FREC decision is communicated in writing to the student and Principal Supervisor. Appeals and Resubmission

The decision of the FREC is an academic judgement and is final. There is no formal appeal route. However, a student may submit a revised proposal in response to feedback.

6.4. External and International Research Approval

Where research involves external bodies (e.g. NHS, social services) or takes place outside England, students must comply with processes and the relevant guidance outlined in the [Code of Practice for Research](#).

6.5. Breaches of Ethics Policy

Students who begin research before securing necessary ethical approval, breach the terms of an ethics approval or fail to follow ethical procedures set out by the University, may be referred for investigation under the policy on Academic and Research Integrity.

7. Submission of the Thesis or Equivalent

This section sets out the operational requirements for submitting a thesis or equivalent work for examination. These requirements apply to all postgraduate research awards governed by this Code.

7.1. Readiness for Submission

Students are responsible for ensuring their work is ready for submission. The supervisory team must confirm that the thesis or equivalent work meets the appropriate standard for examination. A Notice of Intention to Submit form must be completed and submitted to the relevant faculty office, signed by the Principal Supervisor and the Faculty PGR Tutor.

7.2. Submission Format and Requirements

Theses must be submitted electronically using the platform specified by the University (currently Turnitin). The submission must be:

- A single file in PDF format, no larger than 40MB;
- Accompanied by any required documentation;
- Submitted before the maximum submission deadline.

Once submitted, no further changes are permitted. Students may bring a printed soft-bound copy of the thesis to the viva examination for reference.

7.3. Language and Access

Theses must normally be written in English unless prior approval has been granted to submit in another language. Students may request restrictions on access to the final version of the thesis (e.g. for commercial sensitivity or data protection reasons). Such requests must be submitted with the Notice of Intention to Submit and approved in advance.

7.4. Word Limits and Appendices

Maximum word limits apply to theses depending on the award the student is a candidate for and are outlined below.

The maximum word count **includes**:

- All footnotes and end notes;
- In-text citations and quotations;
- Any prefatory material forming part of the argument.

The maximum word count **excludes**:

- Title page and table of contents;
- Abstract;
- Acknowledgements;
- Graphs, tables, maps, diagrams and captions;
- Bibliography and/or reference list;
- Appendices (which are subject to separate limits).

7.4.1. Doctor of Philosophy

- 100,00 words maximum for a standard thesis.
- 80,000 words maximum if including a practice-based component.
- 100,000 words maximum if a Creative Writing thesis, split between a creative component and a critical component (see 7.4.5.).
- Appendices: 20,000 words maximum or 80 pages.

7.4.2. Master of Philosophy

- 60,000 words maximum for a standard thesis.
- 48,000 words maximum if including a practice-based component.
- 60,000 words maximum if a Creative Writing thesis, split between a creative component and a critical component (see 7.4.5.).
- Appendices: 12,000 words maximum or 48 pages.

7.4.3. Professional Doctorates

- The theses must be contained in a credit weighted module which will determine the maximum length.
- 1,500 – 2,000 words per 10 credits: normally 45,000 – 60,000 words in total. Exact Word Counts are made explicit in module descriptors.
- Appendices: 12,000 words maximum or 48 pages.

7.4.4. Doctor of Philosophy by Published Works

A separate policy exists detailing requirements for PhD by Published Works and can be located in the University's Policy Library.

7.4.5. Practice-Based Components

Where the research output under examination includes a practice-based component, there must be a critical commentary accompanying the submission to provide context and analysis. The percentage weightings between the practical and written components are to be agreed by the supervisory team, duly considering each subject discipline's national standards and conventions. For example, for a Doctor of Philosophy award, if the expected balance is 50% practical and 50% written, the word count for the written component would be a maximum of 50,000 words.

7.4.6. Purpose of Appendices

Appendices must be clearly labelled and must only contain supplementary material. They must not be used to circumvent the main thesis word count. Declaration and Excess Word Count

Students must declare the word count at the point of submission. A thesis that exceeds the limits outlined above will not be accepted for examination unless prior written approval has been granted by the Faculty PGR Tutor. Where no such approval exists, the submission may be returned unexamined.

7.5. Final Submission After Examination

After successful examination and completion of any required modifications, the final version of the thesis must be submitted to the University's institutional repository. The submission must be in PDF format and only made once any changes required by the Examiners have been made and approved. If any access restrictions have been approved, these will be implemented by Learning and Information Services.

The University Assessment Board will not grant the award until the final version of the thesis has been deposited.

8. Examination

This section sets out the requirements and procedures for the appointment of examiners, the conduct of the viva examination, and the determination of outcomes.

8.1. Appointment of Examiners

Examiners are appointed upon receipt of the Notice of Intention to Submit form. The examination panel is approved by the Faculty PGR Tutor and confirmed by Academic & Registry Services.

For all research degrees, the panel will normally include one Internal Examiner (a member of University staff) and one External Examiner (not employed by the University). Exceptionally, two external examiners may be appointed to examine a thesis in the absence of an appropriate internal examiner, but this can only happen with the prior approval of the Chair of PGR Programmes Subcommittee and the Deputy Academic Registrar.

If the candidate is a current member of staff, two External Examiners must be appointed in addition to the internal examiner.

An Independent Chair, who must be a member of University staff, must also be appointed.

All appointments must be confirmed before the thesis is sent for examination. Students must not be informed of the examiners' names until the appointments have been confirmed.

8.2. Examination Panel Eligibility Criteria

All examiners must:

- Hold a doctoral qualification or, exceptionally, demonstrate equivalent academic and/or professional standing;
- Normally be based in or have an affiliation to a Higher Education Institution. Examiners not based in a recognised HEI can only be appointed with the agreement of the Chair of PGR Programmes Subcommittee. In such instances, Faculties will be expected to provide a mentor to the relevant external examiner;
- Be a subject specialist with relevant research experience and publications, or senior-level professional practice;
- Have examined at least two research degrees between them.

Internal Examiners must be a member of the academic staff of the University and must have completed mandatory examiner training (renewed every three years). They must not have participated in the final Annual Monitoring Process prior to submission.

Independent Chairs must be members of University academic staff in an academic division different to that of the student. They must have been trained for the role, be an accredited supervisor, and not have been involved in the student's supervision or annual monitoring. Normally the Independent Chair will be from a different School to the student.

8.3. Roles and Responsibilities of the Examination Panel

All examiners are responsible for:

- Reading the thesis and submitting an independent initial report at least five working days prior to the viva.
- Conducting the viva examination with fairness and rigour, ensuring that the candidate has every opportunity to explain and defend their work.
- Agreeing on an outcome using their knowledge and experience to ensure consistency of standards.
- Completing a joint final report within ten working days of the viva examination.
- Where modifications are required, providing clear, detailed guidance on what must be addressed. Modifications must be clear and directive regarding what the examiners expect the students to do prior to the submission of a final draft.
- Treating the thesis as privileged and confidential information.

The **Internal Examiner** has additional responsibility for:

- Arranging the date and location of the viva examination by mutual agreement in consultation with all parties.
- Checking if the student wishes to give a short presentation at the start of the viva and ensuring, when in person, the location of the viva has appropriate IT provision for that presentation;
- Ensuring the examination is conducted in accordance with this Code of Practice.
- Coordinating the completion and submission of the final joint examiners report.
- Making arrangements for any second viva examination if required following resubmission.
- Ensuring any reasonable adjustments are in place for the viva as outlined in the Student's Inclusion Plan.

The **External Examiner** must:

- Provide rigorous external scrutiny to ensure the work meets appropriate national standards.
- Complete an External Examiner Feedback form following the examination.
- Be available to approve any modifications where they have been designated to do so.

The **Independent Chair** ensures:

- Initial independent reports have been completed and shared prior to the viva examination, supported by Faculty Research and Innovation Teams as appropriate;

- The viva process is explained to all parties at the outset; Procedural fairness is maintained throughout the examination;
- The candidate's welfare is considered during the viva;
- Any procedural irregularities or concerns about candidate welfare are addressed appropriately;
- A record of the conduct of the viva is submitted to Academic & Registry Services within ten working days;

The Independent Chair does not participate in the academic assessment of the work or the candidate but may suspend or adjourn the viva if serious concerns arise about procedure or candidate welfare.

8.4. Viva Examination and Conduct

The viva must normally be held within three months of the submission of the thesis (or equivalent). The default position is that vivas are conducted online, though students may request an in-person examination, through the Intention to Submit Form, which should be facilitated wherever possible.

The viva examination cannot be recorded. Reasonable adjustments to the conduct of the viva should be made for students with disabilities, following consultation with Student Services.

Preparation and conduct:

- Examiners meet before the candidate joins to agree how the examination will proceed and confirm the candidate's identity.
- The Independent Chair explains the process and roles to all parties.
- The examination focusses on the work, the research undertaken, and the candidate's understanding of the broader field.
- The candidate must be given adequate opportunity to respond to questions and defend their work.
- Informal feedback on the work and examination should be provided to the candidate on the day.

Duration and format:

The viva typically lasts between one and three hours, depending on the nature of the research and the questions arising. Examiners should ensure sufficient time is available to conduct a thorough examination, while being mindful of the candidate's welfare. Students are permitted, optionally, to give a 10 minute presentation at the start of their viva that focuses on providing an overview of their thesis and central

argument. Students may wish to bring special attention to the original contribution to knowledge and/or practice their thesis makes.

8.5. Examination Outcomes

Following the **first** submission of the work, the Examiners may recommend to the University Assessment Board:

- **Award of the degree as submitted** – no changes required;
- **Award of the degree subject to minor modifications** – corrections that do not change the substance of the thesis (completed within 3 months);
- **Award of the degree subject to major modifications** – more substantial changes that may require limited further analysis but do not require new data collection (completed within 6 months);
- **Resubmission of the work** – substantial rewrite or reworking, additional data collection, or substantially altered conclusions required (within 12 months, normally with further viva examination);
- **Award of a lower degree with modifications** (completed within 3 months);
- **Award of a lower degree without modifications;**
- **Failure with no award.**

Following a **resubmission**, the available outcomes are the same except that no further resubmission is permitted. A candidate may only resubmit once.

8.5.1. Award of a lower degree

If the Examiners recommend the award of a lower degree (e.g. MPhil instead of PhD), they may specify whether any modifications to the submitted thesis are required. However, the candidate should not normally be required to reduce the word count to meet the maximum permitted for the lower award.

8.6. Disagreement Between Examiners

Where Examiners cannot agree on an outcome, each must prepare an independent final report and submit it to Academic & Registry Services. The Chair of the Postgraduate Research Programmes Subcommittee will review these reports along with the Independent Chair's report on the conduct of the viva.

Following this review, and after seeking advice from Academic & Registry Services, the Chair of PGR Programmes Subcommittee may:

- Require new Examiners to be appointed and the viva examination to be re-held;
or
- Appoint an additional External Examiner to review the thesis.

8.7. Modifications and Resubmission

Modifications should always be listed clearly, and expectations should be made explicit for students so that they know exactly what the examiners require of them.

Minor modifications are appropriate when changes:

- Correct errors, omissions, or typographical mistakes;
- Address limited stylistic or grammatical issues;
- Require corrections to references or minor changes to figures;
- Do not alter the substance or central argument of the thesis;
- May require the redrafting of up to one chapter.

Major modifications are appropriate when:

- Substantial amounts of minor modifications are required.
- Multiple chapters need reordering or redrafting without substantive change to the central argument.
- Limited further analysis is required but no new data collection.

Resubmission is appropriate when the work requires:

- Substantial rewriting or reworking;
- Additional data collection;
- Substantially altered argument and/or conclusions.

Candidates must complete modifications within the specified timeframe. The Examiner(s) responsible for approving modifications will confirm completion to Academic & Registry Services.

For resubmissions, candidates must work within the recommendations specified by the original Examiners. The same Examiners will normally assess the resubmission, though they retain discretion over whether a second viva examination is required.

8.8. External Examiner Reports and Quality Enhancement

All External Examiners complete a feedback form following the examination, commenting on the standard of the thesis, the conduct of the examination, and any observations about the programme or supervision.

These reports are reviewed by Academic & Registry Services and the Chair of PGR Programmes Subcommittee. This contributes to the University's ongoing quality assurance and enhancement activities. An annual summary of External Examiner feedback is provided to the Postgraduate Research Programmes Subcommittee.

Initial examiner reports are not provided to candidates, though candidates may request copies of their examiner reports under data protection legislation. Joint final reports, inclusive of required modifications, will be sent to candidates.

9. Academic Integrity and Research Misconduct

This section outlines the University's expectations regarding academic integrity and the procedures for addressing suspected misconduct in postgraduate research.

9.1. University Expectations

All postgraduate research students are expected to conduct their research with the highest standards of academic integrity. This includes honesty in data collection and analysis, proper attribution of sources, compliance with ethical approval conditions, and transparency in reporting findings and methodology.

9.2. Research Misconduct

Research misconduct encompasses any departure from accepted standards of research practice, including but not limited to fabrication or falsification of data, plagiarism, breaches of ethical approval, and failure to declare conflicts of interest.

9.3. Procedures and Consequences

Any party involved in postgraduate research (supervisors, examiners etc.) must report any concerns they have about possible misconduct. The detailed procedures for reporting, investigating, and addressing breaches of academic integrity and research misconduct are set out in the University's Academic Conduct Policy.

Confirmed breaches of academic integrity and instances of research misconduct can result in serious consequences, including the termination of studies.

9.4. Guidance for Good Conduct

Students who are uncertain about research integrity requirements should seek guidance from their supervisors who will be able to direct them to appropriate sources of support. They may also consult the University's Code of Practice for Research.

10. Student Support

This section outlines the support services available to postgraduate research students and the procedures for raising concerns or complaints about their research degree experience.

10.1. Available Support Services

The University provides a range of support services for postgraduate research students throughout their studies. Academic support is primarily provided through

the supervisory team, School PGR Tutors and Faculty PGR Tutors. Additional guidance on administrative matters is available from each Faculty.

Pastoral and wellbeing support is available through Student Services, including counselling, disability support, and financial advice. Students experiencing difficulties should normally discuss these with their supervisors in the first instance so they can be directed to the most appropriate source of support.

10.2. Reasonable Adjustments for Disability

Students with disabilities are entitled to reasonable adjustments to ensure equal access to their research programme. This may include modifications to supervision arrangements, examination procedures, or access to facilities and resources.

Students requiring reasonable adjustments should contact Student Services as early as possible to discuss their needs. Any adjustments to examination procedures, including the viva examination, must be agreed in advance and will be implemented in consultation with the relevant academic staff.

10.3. Exceptional Circumstances

Students who experience significant personal, health, or other circumstances that impact their ability to engage with their research, but for whom suspension is not appropriate, may be entitled to additional support or adjustments. This may include extensions to deadlines, temporary modifications to supervision arrangements, or other appropriate measures.

Students experiencing exceptional circumstances should discuss these with their supervisory team and may also seek support from Student Services. Where circumstances significantly impact academic progress, these should be documented and may be taken into account during progress monitoring processes.

10.4. Raising Concerns

Students who have concerns about any aspect of their research degree experience should initially raise these informally with their supervisors or Faculty PGR Tutor. Where informal resolution is not possible or appropriate, formal procedures are available.

The University's Student Complaints Procedure provides a framework for addressing concerns about the quality of services, facilities or administrative processes. This procedure includes clear timelines, investigation processes, and review mechanisms.

10.5. Academic Appeals

Students have the right to appeal academic-related decisions, including those relating to progress monitoring and examination outcomes. The grounds for appeal,

procedures, and timelines are set out in the University's Academic Appeals Policy, which incorporates specific provisions for postgraduate research matters.

10.6. Dignity and Respect

The University is committed to maintaining an environment of mutual respect and dignity. Students who experience or witness bullying, harassment, or discrimination should report these concerns using the University's Dignity and Respect Policy, which provides both informal and formal resolution procedures.

10.7. External Review

Students who remain dissatisfied after exhausting the University's internal procedures may be eligible to request a review by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA). Information about this option is provided as part of the completion of internal procedures.

11. Quality Assurance and Enhancement

This section outlines how the University monitors and enhances the quality of its postgraduate research provision to ensure consistent standards and continuous improvement. This section must be read with reference to the University's policy on the monitoring and review of academic provision.

11.1. Annual Course Monitoring and Review

Each faculty is required to conduct annual monitoring of its postgraduate research provision. This includes reviewing recruitment patterns, student progress and completion rates, the research environment and available resources. Faculties must reflect on feedback from students, especially University-wide surveys or data from PRES, supervisors, and external examiners to identify areas for enhancement.

Annual monitoring reports are submitted to Faculty Education and Student Experience Committees and subsequently to the Postgraduate Research Programmes Subcommittee which has oversight responsibility for the quality of research degree provision across the University.

11.2. External Examiner Contributions

External Examiners play a crucial role in quality assurance by providing independent assessment of academic standards and examination processes. Their reports are reviewed systematically to identify themes, trends, and opportunities for enhancement. An annual summary of External Examiner feedback is compiled and considered by the Postgraduate Research Programmes Subcommittee.

11.3. Student Feedback and Engagement

In partnership with Chester Students' Union, the University actively seeks feedback from research students through mechanisms including the Postgraduate Research

Experience Survey, annual progress monitoring reports, and local faculty initiatives. Student representatives participate in relevant committees to ensure student perspectives inform policy development and enhancement activities.

11.4. Enhancement Activities

The University promotes enhancement through sharing of good practice, supervisor development programmes, student training initiatives, and policy refinement based on evidence from monitoring activities. The Postgraduate Research Programmes Subcommittee coordinates enhancement activities and ensures that identified improvements are implemented effectively across the University.

12. Awards

This section outlines the final requirements for the grant of postgraduate research awards.

12.1. Final Thesis Submission

Following successful examination and completion of any required modifications, students must submit the final version of their thesis to the University's institutional repository (ChesterRep) within four weeks of receiving notification of their successful examination or completion of modifications.

The final submission must be in PDF format and include any access restrictions that have been approved during the examination process. Students whose research includes creative components should seek guidance from the supervisory team regarding repository requirements.

12.2. Award Confirmation

Awards are granted by the University Assessment Board, which receives recommendations from the examination panel. No award will be granted until the final version of the thesis has been deposited in the institutional repository, and all other requirements have been satisfied.

Certification, presentation of awards, posthumous awards, and aegrotat awards are governed by the University's Academic Regulations.