

Section 16D

Nottingham Trent University

Quality Handbook

Part E: Regulations

**Section 16D: Master and
Doctor of Philosophy**

Section 16D

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Preface

1. Scope of the regulations

- 1.1 These regulations apply to all students registered on PhD or MPhil awards with effect from the 2018/19 academic year. The PhD by Published Work award, however, will follow the regulations under Quality Handbook (QH) Section 16F: PhD by Published Work.
- 1.2 Unless specific mention is made, the regulations do not distinguish between students on different modes of attendance or on different types of awards.
- 1.3 The regulations apply to all PhD and MPhil awards (except for the PhD by Published Work) unless the University Research Committee (URC) has approved alternative arrangements.

2. Changes to the regulations

- 2.1 The University reserves the right to modify from time to time its regulations for the admission and progression of students and for the conferment of awards.
- 2.2 The regulations will be reviewed and updated periodically in line with developments in University policy and practice. There may be differences in regulations as they apply to different cohorts of students registered for the same award. Every effort will be made to inform students about proposed changes and, if educationally appropriate, introduce such changes for all cohorts of students.

3. Consultation

- 3.1 While the University reserves the right to modify its assessment regulations at any time, particular thought will be given to the timescale for introducing changes and the effect on current cohorts of students. Changes would not normally be introduced for implementation in the current year of study, but would take effect in the following academic year.
- 3.2 Changes to the regulations should be made after appropriate consultation. At University level, proposed changes will be discussed with staff who will be given the opportunity to comment on such changes. Students will also have an opportunity to comment. Proposed changes may be modified in the light of feedback.
- 3.3 The above processes apply to all research awards.

4. Students with disabilities

- 4.1 Reasonable adjustments to assessment arrangements will be made to ensure that students with disabilities are not substantially disadvantaged. The Doctoral School will ensure that students are made aware of the procedures for requesting adjustments, will consider such requests and will agree arrangements, referring to

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Student Support Services and the Academic Registry for guidance as necessary. Any agreed adjustments will be notified to the oral examination team.

Registration matters

5. Registration periods

- 5.1 A student on a PhD or MPhil must enrol as a student of the University, and continue to re-enrol on an annual basis until conferment of the award has taken place.
- 5.2 For the purposes of calculating maximum and minimum periods of registration, students' registration is deemed to run from the date on which they commence their studies.
- 5.3 The minimum and maximum periods of registration are as follows:

Award	Mode	Minimum Length	Maximum Length
MPhil	Full-time	18 months	36 months
	Part-time	36 months	72 months
PhD (via transfer from MPhil registration & including that period of MPhil registration)	Full-time	24 months	48 months
	Part-time	48 months	96 months
PhD (direct)	Full-time	24 months	48 months
	Part-time	48 months	96 months

- 5.4 Maximum registration periods include any writing up period.
- 5.5 The University does not stipulate normal periods of registration for its research degrees within the minimum and maximum. A student who has made unusually rapid progress with a programme of research may apply to the College Research Degrees Committee (CRDC) for permission to submit a thesis in advance of the minimum period of registration set out above.
- 5.6 Where a student has completed up to 24 months of full-time registration, transfer to part-time registration is allowed, in which case, for purposes of calculation of the minimum or maximum permitted periods, the equivalent period of part-time registration will be considered twice that of the actual full-time period of registration remaining.
- 5.7 Where a student has completed between 24 and 36 months of full-time registration transfer is only permitted to a writing-up registration category, which, for purposes

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of calculation of the maximum permitted period, will be considered equivalent to full-time registration. A student can only transfer to a writing-up registration category at the point of re-enrolment for the next academic year. Transfer to a writing-up registration is not permitted part way through a student's academic year.

- 5.8 Where a student transfers from part-time to full-time registration, for purposes of calculation of the minimum or maximum permitted periods, the equivalent period of full-time registration will be considered to be half that of the actual part-time period of registration remaining.

6. Extensions to the registration period

- 6.1 A CRDC may, because of circumstances beyond a student's control, exceptionally extend a student's period of registration beyond the permitted maximum, normally for not more than one year.
- 6.2 Appropriate evidence is required to support requests for extension.

Guidance note 6.1

Students should be made aware that taking up a full-time job will not be taken as evidence of "exceptional circumstances" justifying an extension of registration.

7. Suspension of studies

- 7.1 Where the student is prevented, by ill-health or other cause (such as accidents, death or serious ill-health of a close relative, maternity, problems beyond the control of the student), from making progress on the course, the registration may be suspended by the CRDC for a period of not less than a month and not more than a year at a time. Appropriate evidence is required to support all requests for suspension. Retrospective suspension of registration will not normally be granted for more than three months.
- 7.2 The total number of suspensions a student is permitted should total no more than one third of the maximum registration period. Students who are suspending studies for maternity or paternity leave are exempt from this regulation.
- 7.3 When returning from a period of suspension of studies, a student is required to meet with the supervisory team to agree targets and to establish whether previously achieved project approval remains valid.

8. Withdrawal

- 8.1 Where a student has discontinued the course, the withdrawal of registration must be notified to the CRDC.

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Progression

9. Project approval

- 9.1 All students must have the paperwork for their projects submitted for approval by the CRDC within six months from the date of registration for a full-time student and within 12 months from the date of registration for a part-time student. A maximum period for the project approval process will be nine months for a full-time student and 18 months for a part-time student.
- 9.2 In approving a project, the CRDC must be satisfied with the following:
- the appropriateness and viability of the proposed programme of work;
 - the suitability and qualification of the supervisory team;
 - the relevance and appropriateness of a programme of related studies, normally to include: transferable and generic skills, subject specific training, and attendance at and participation in staff/postgraduate seminars.
- 9.3 In cases where a student's work forms part of a larger group project, each individual project must in itself be distinguishable for the purposes of assessment and be appropriate for the award. The application should indicate clearly each individual contribution and its relationship to the group project.
- 9.4 Where a project is part of a piece of funded research, the CRDC should establish that the terms on which the research is funded do not detract from the fulfilment of the objectives and requirements of the student's research degree.
- 9.5 Where a project proposal is not approved, the student will normally be given an opportunity to seek approval for a revised project. If, having been given an opportunity to remedy defects, the proposal remains unsatisfactory, the CRDC can apply a three-month period of probation (see regulation 11.1 below). Where project approval has not been secured at, or by the time of, the first annual monitoring event, the CRDC may deem this, in itself, to be evidence of unsatisfactory progress.
- 9.6 Any request for a change to the original arrangements for registration approved at point of Project Approval must be made in writing to the CRDC for approval. Any change to original arrangements for PhD registration must be approved by the CRDC.

10. Transfer of registration from MPhil to PhD

- 10.1 A full-time student who has been registered on an MPhil for a period of at least 12 months and who has satisfactorily completed all applicable monitoring requirements may apply to the CRDC for transfer to PhD. Such applications must be approved by the CRDC within 24 months of their registration start date.
- 10.2 A part-time student who has been registered on an MPhil for a period of at least 24 months and who has satisfactorily completed all applicable monitoring

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requirements may apply to the CRDC for transfer to PhD. Such applications must be approved by the CRDC within 48 months of their registration start date.

- 10.3 A transfer panel may make a recommendation for transfer if the report and performance in the presentation are deemed sufficient to justify it.
- 10.4 The process must involve evidence of substantial progress by the student and involve an independent **assessor** appointed by the CRDC. The student should prepare a progress report on the work undertaken in a format to be determined by the CRDC.
- 10.5 Before approving transfer from MPhil to PhD, the CRDC must be satisfied that the student has made sufficient progress and that the proposed programme provides a suitable basis for work at PhD standard which the student is capable of pursuing to completion.
- 10.6 In the event of an unsatisfactory transfer application, the CRDC may offer the candidate the opportunity to revise the application in the light of feedback from the panel. In the event that the transfer application is not approved, the student will be required to re-register for an MPhil only.
- 10.7 A student who is registered for the degree of PhD and who is unable to complete the approved programme of work may, at any time prior to the submission of the thesis for examination, apply to the CRDC for their registration to revert to that for MPhil, provided that the maximum permitted period for MPhil registration is not exceeded.

Guidance note 10.6

Exceptionally, a student who has passed the MPhil to PhD transfer stage and is within their maximum period of PhD registration may request in writing, at the time of submitting their PhD thesis, that the thesis be considered for an MPhil.

11. Probation

- 11.1 A student who is deemed by CRDC to be making unsatisfactory progress, either at project approval, monitoring or transfer can be placed on a three-month probation.
- 11.2 During the probationary period, the supervisory team sets targets for the student, and reviews progress through regular supervisory meetings.
- 11.3 The student's progress will be reconsidered immediately after the probationary period. Where there is no improvement in progression, the CRDC may terminate the student's registration.
- 11.4 Where a student has more than one probationary period during the period of registration, this may be taken into consideration when reviewing a student's progress.

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Examiners

12. Examining teams

- 12.1 All research degree students are examined by at least two and not more than three examiners, of whom at least one will be an external examiner and one an internal examiner.
- 12.2 The examining team must have knowledge and understanding of UK sector agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and the assurance and enhancement of student learning opportunities, e.g. the QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ).
- 12.3 The examining team as a whole should have substantial experience of successful supervision and examination of research degree students. Normally, the examining team as a whole should have completed a minimum of three examinations in the UK. If an examiner has no previous experience of examination in the UK, they should join an experienced team. If the external examiner is inexperienced, the expectation is that they would be supported by an experienced internal examiner and Independent Chair. If an inexperienced internal examiner is appointed, the expectation is that the external examiner would be experienced and the examining team would be supported by an experienced Independent Chair.
- 12.4 The Director of Studies submits proposals for the student's examiners to the CRDC between three and six months prior to the expected date of submission of the thesis.
- 12.5 Upon approval of the examining team, the Independent Chair makes sure that the examiners are fully briefed about the regulations under which the candidate is being examined and the assessment process as a whole.
- 12.6 The student's examination may not take place until the arrangements have been approved and a casual worker contract for the external examiner(s) has been issued by Corporate Human Resources.
- 12.7 Where the student is a permanent member of University staff, a second external examiner is appointed in place of the internal examiner. A student who is on a fixed short-term employment contract (for instance, a research assistant) is exempt from the requirements of this regulation.

13. Chair

- 13.1 The oral examination is chaired by an independent, senior, experienced academic of the University.
- 13.2 The chair is appointed at the same time as the rest of the examination team.
- 13.3 The role of the chair is to ensure that the examination is conducted with due regard to fair play and in compliance with these regulations.

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- 13.4 The chair acts as source of experience and guidance to the examiners about the conduct of the examination and ensures that reports are completed and, where appropriate, feedback is provided to the student.
- 13.5 The chair also monitors the completion of reports relating to minor or major revisions and will liaise with the externals about the action to be taken in response to any resubmission required of the student.

14. Internal examiners

- 14.1 Internal examiners have experience in the general area of the student's work and have substantial experience of successful supervision and examination of research degree students. If the internal examiner has no substantial experience, the expectation is that they would be supported by an experienced external examiner and Independent Chair. An internal examiner will be:
- a member of staff of the University who is not a member of the student's supervisory team; or
 - a member of staff of the student's Collaborating Establishment who is not a member of the student's supervisory team.
- 14.2 The following restrictions on appointment apply.
- An internal examiner should not previously have acted as an independent assessor, either for progress review or transfer of registration, in respect of the candidate being examined.
 - A student currently enrolled on a research degree at the University cannot act as an internal examiner.

15. External examiners

- 15.1 The CRDC is guided by the following criteria when considering external examiner nominations:
- External examiners should have experience in the specialist area of the student's thesis and demonstrate a consistent and extensive record of relevant publication.
 - External examiners should have substantial experience of successful supervision and examination of research degree students. If the external examiner has no substantial experience, the expectation is that they would be supported by an experienced internal examiner and Independent Chair.
 - An external examiner must be fluent in English, and where appointed to examine a thesis written in languages other than English, must also be fluent in the relevant language(s).
- 15.2 The following **restrictions** on appointments apply:
- An external examiner must be independent both of the University (and of the Collaborating Establishment), must not have acted previously as the

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student's supervisor or adviser, and must have no other conflict of interest involving the research student.

- b. A member of the Board of Governors or a committee of the University (or one of its collaborative partners) cannot be appointed as an external examiner. Additionally, a current employee of the University or one of its collaborative partners (in the case of a collaborative PhD) cannot be appointed as an external examiner.
 - c. An external examiner should not be either a supervisor of another student or an external examiner on a taught course in the same University School.
 - d. A former NTU student or member of staff cannot be appointed as an external examiner unless a minimum of five years has elapsed.
 - e. No external examiner may be appointed if by doing so a reciprocal arrangement for external examining would arise involving cognate programmes of study at another institution.
 - f. No external examiner may be appointed who has been in a formal collaboration, or who has authored a research paper, with a member of the supervision team within the three years prior to the examination.
 - g. The same external examiner should not be approved so frequently that his/her familiarity with the University might prejudice objective judgement.
- 15.3 The appropriate College will be responsible for determining and paying the fees and expenses of the external examiner(s). The responsible College will be that which employs or has most recently employed the student's Director of Studies.

Determining awards

16. Examination arrangements

- 16.1 The examination for the MPhil and PhD will have two stages:
- a. preliminary assessment of the thesis;
 - b. its defence by oral examination.
- 16.2 Each examiner must read and examine the thesis, and submit an independent preliminary report a minimum of one week before the oral examination is held.
- 16.3 In completing the preliminary report, each examiner should consider whether the thesis provisionally satisfies the requirements of the degree and, where possible, make an appropriate provisional recommendation subject to the outcome of the oral examination.
- 16.4 Preliminary report forms must be completed independently and without formal or informal consultation between examiners.
- 16.5 An examiner, having received the thesis and wishing to contact another examiner, the student or member of the supervisory team should do so only through the Doctoral School Office.

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- 16.6 An examiner may contact another examiner or member of the supervisory team for the purpose of making practical arrangements about the oral examination.
- 16.7 It is considered good practice that the examiners have a private meeting before the oral examination to discuss the merits of the candidate's output and to plan the conduct of the oral examination, including the questions they each wish to ask the candidate.

17. Alternative forms of examination

- 17.1 Where the student would be under serious disadvantage if required to undergo an oral examination for reasons of sickness or disability, an alternative form of examination may be approved by URDC. Such approval must not be given because the student's knowledge of the language in which the thesis is presented is inadequate.

18. Conduct of the oral examination

- 18.1 The oral examination will normally be held in the UK. Exceptionally, the examination may take place abroad or by video conference.
- 18.2 The supervisory team should make itself available to the student's examiners. Supervisors may, with the express written permission of the student, attend the oral examination. They may not contribute to the discussion.
- 18.3 Recording of the oral examination is not permitted.
- 18.4 The student will take no part in the arrangement of the oral examination.
- 18.5 Where the University Research Degrees Committee (URDC) is made aware of a failure to comply with all the procedures of the examination process, it may declare the examination null and void and appoint new examiners.

19. Outcomes

- 19.1 Following the completion of the oral examination the examiners may recommend that the candidate on a PhD or MPhil award:
- is awarded the degree;
 - is awarded the degree subject to minor amendments being made to the thesis to the satisfaction of the examiners (maximum 3 months to complete the amendments for full time students, maximum 6 months for part time students);
 - is awarded the degree subject to substantive amendments being made to the thesis to the satisfaction of the examiners (maximum 6 months to complete the amendments for full time students, maximum 12 months for part time students);

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- d. is permitted to re-submit for the degree and be re-examined, with or without an oral examination (maximum 12 months to re-submit for full time students, maximum 24 months for part time students);
 - e. is not to be awarded the degree and is not permitted to be re-examined, in which case the candidate may be awarded the appropriate interim award where they meet the requirements of such an award.
- 19.2 Examiners may indicate informally their recommendation on the result of the examination to the candidate but they should make it clear that the decision rests with the URDC, acting on the advice of the CRDC, and under powers delegated by Academic Board, to which all decisions are reported.
- 19.3 Candidates should be allowed one further opportunity to satisfy the assessment criteria.
- 19.4 Recommendation (e) should only be made in exceptional circumstances.
- 19.5 Should the extent of the candidate's failure to achieve the PhD assessment criteria be such that the candidate would be unable to satisfy the assessment criteria with a submission for re-examination within one calendar year, recommendation (d) can be considered with a recommendation for an exceptional extension of the period for submission for re-examination.
- 19.6 Following the oral examination, the examiners should, where they agree, submit a joint report and recommendation relating to the award of the degree.
- 19.7 The preliminary reports and joint recommendation of the examiners should together provide sufficiently detailed comments on the scope and quality of the work to enable the CRDC to satisfy itself that the recommendation is justified.
- 19.8 Where the examiners do not agree, separate reports and recommendations should be submitted.
- 19.9 The CRDC should consider the reports and recommendation(s) of the examiners in respect of the candidate and make a recommendation to the URDC. The power to confer the degree rests with the Academic Board of the University but is delegated to the URDC.
- 19.10 Where the examiners' recommendations are not unanimous, URDC may:
- a. accept a majority recommendation (if the majority recommendation includes at least one external examiner);
 - b. accept the recommendation of the external examiner; or
 - c. require the appointment of an additional external examiner.
- 19.11 Where an additional external examiner is appointed, they should prepare an independent preliminary report on the basis of the thesis and, if considered necessary, may conduct a further oral examination.
- 19.12 The additional examiner should not be informed of the individual recommendations of the other examiners.

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- 19.13 On receipt of the report from the additional examiner, the URDC should complete the examination.
- 19.14 A further examination in addition to the oral examination may be requested by the original examiners. In such cases, the approval of the Chair of the URDC should be sought.
- 19.15 Where such an examination is arranged following an oral examination, it should be held within two calendar months of the oral examination unless the URDC permits otherwise. Any such examination will be deemed to be part of the candidate's first examination.
- 19.16 Where the URDC decides that the degree is not to be awarded and that no re-examination be permitted, the examiners should prepare an agreed statement of the deficiencies of the thesis and the reason for their recommendation, which will be forwarded to the candidate.
- 19.17 The PhD may be awarded posthumously on the basis of a thesis completed by a candidate which is ready for submission for examination. In such cases the URDC will seek evidence that the candidate would have been likely to be successful had the oral examination taken place.

20. Re-examination

- 20.1 One re-examination is permitted subject to the following requirements:
- A candidate who fails to satisfy the examiners at the first examination, may, on the recommendation of the examiners and with the approval of the CRDC, be permitted to revise the assessment and be re-examined.
 - The examiners provide the candidate with written guidance on the deficiencies of the first submission.
 - The candidate must submit for re-examination within the period of one calendar year for a full-time student and two calendar years for a part-time student from the date of the most part of the first examination.
- 20.2 URDC may require that an additional external examiner be appointed for the re-examination.
- 20.3 There are four forms of re-examination as follows:
- Where the candidate's performance in the first oral examination was satisfactory but the thesis was unsatisfactory and the examiners on re-examination certify that the thesis as revised is satisfactory, the CRDC may exempt the candidate from further oral examination.
 - Where the candidate's performance in the first oral examination was unsatisfactory and the thesis was also unsatisfactory, re-examination should include a re-examination of the thesis and an oral examination.
 - Where on the first examination the candidate's thesis was satisfactory but the performance in the oral examination was not satisfactory the candidate

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should be re-examined by oral examination, without being requested to revise and re-submit the thesis.

- d. Where on the first examination the thesis was satisfactory but the candidate's performance in relation to the other requirements for the award of the degree was not satisfactory, the examiners may propose instead a different form of re-examination to test the candidate's abilities. Such examination may take place only with the approval of the CRDC.
- 20.4 For re-examination, each examiner should read and examine the thesis and submit an independent preliminary report before any oral or alternative form of examination is held.
 - 20.5 In completing the preliminary report, each examiner should consider whether the thesis provisionally satisfies the requirements of the degree and where possible make an appropriate provisional recommendation subject to the outcome of any oral examination.
 - 20.6 The conduct of the oral re-examination will be the same as for the original examination, unless agreed otherwise by URDC.
 - 20.7 Following the re-examination of the thesis, or following an oral or other examination, the examiners should, where they agree, submit, a joint report and recommendation relating to the award of the PhD.
 - 20.8 The preliminary reports and joint recommendation of the examiners should together provide sufficiently detailed comments on the scope and quality of the work to enable the CRDC to satisfy itself that the recommendation is justified.
 - 20.9 Where the examiners do not agree, separate reports and recommendations should be submitted.
 - 20.10 Following the completion of the re-examination the examiners may recommend that:
 - a. the candidate is awarded the degree;
 - b. the candidate is awarded the degree subject to minor amendments being made to the thesis (maximum 3 months to complete the amendments for full time students, maximum 6 months for part time students);
 - c. the candidate is not awarded the degree and is not permitted to be re-examined, in which case the candidate may be awarded an MPhil.
 - 20.11 Where the agreed recommendation of the examiners follows decision (b) above, they must together complete the Form of Guidance which will be transmitted to the candidate and the supervisory team.
 - 20.12 Where the examiners are satisfied that the candidate has in general reached the standard required for the degree, but consider that the candidate's thesis requires some minor amendments and corrections to warrant the submission of a revised thesis, and recommend that the degree be awarded subject to the candidate amending the thesis to the satisfaction of the internal and/or the external examiner(s), they should indicate to the candidate in writing what amendments and corrections are required.

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- 20.13 Where the examiners' recommendations are not unanimous, the URDC may:
- accept a majority recommendation (provided that the majority recommendation includes at least one external examiner);
 - accept the recommendation of the external examiner; or
 - require the appointment of an additional external examiner.
- 20.14 Where an additional external examiner is appointed, they should prepare an independent preliminary report on the basis of the assessment and, if considered necessary, may conduct a further oral examination. That examiner should not be informed of the individual recommendations of the other examiners. On receipt of the report from the additional examiner, the URDC will complete the examination.
- 20.15 A further examination in addition to the oral examination may be requested by the examiners. In such cases, the approval of the Academic Board should be sought without delay. Where such an examination is arranged following an oral examination, it should normally be held within two calendar months of the oral examination unless the Academic Board permits otherwise.
- 20.16 Where the Academic Board decides that the PhD is not awarded, the examiners should prepare an agreed statement of the deficiencies of the thesis and the reason for their recommendation, which is forwarded to the candidate.

Guidance note 20.4

Where a member(s) of the original examining team is not available to participate in the re-examination, a new examiner(s) should be appointed and provided with access to the joint report of the original examining team so they can judge whether the resubmission/oral examination satisfies the deficiencies identified at the original examination.

Policy owner
CADQ

Change history			
Version:	Approval date:	Implementation date:	Nature of significant revisions:
Sept 2016	13.07.16 (URDC)	01.10.16	More clarity on the causes of suspension More clarity on the requirements for examining teams
Sept 2017	12.07.17 (URDC)	01.10.17	Clarification on the deadline for submitting proposals for the viva examining team
Sept 2018	12.09.18	01.10.18	Clarification on the deadline for submitting papers for project approval

Equality Impact Assessment		
Version:	EIA date:	Completed by:
Sept 2015	16.11.2015	CADQ