

Nottingham Trent University

Quality Handbook

**Part B: Assuring and
Enhancing Quality**

**Section 11: Research
degrees**

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The University recognises the importance of a strong, diverse and inclusive doctoral community in the pursuit of research excellence and impact. The University is firmly committed to the promotion of equality and will not unlawfully discriminate, or tolerate discrimination (direct or indirect, harassment or victimisation) on grounds of age, disability, ethnicity (including race, colour, caste and nationality), gender identity, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation; this includes discrimination by association or due to perception.

All research degrees at the University are mapped to the UK QAA Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications in England and Wales.

1. Scope of the regulations

- 1.1 These regulations normally apply to all doctoral candidates registered for PhD awards, Professional Doctorate (ProfD) courses and doctorates by Published, Established or Creative works awards with effect from the 2020/21 academic year.
- 1.2 Unless specific mention is made, the regulations do not distinguish between doctoral candidates on different modes of attendance or on different types of awards.
- 1.3 Where collaborative programmes diverge from these regulations, these are specified in the programme documentation.

2. Changes to the regulations

- 2.1 The regulations are reviewed and updated periodically in line with developments in University and sector policy and practice.
- 2.2 Changes would not normally be introduced for implementation in the current year of study but would take effect in the following academic year.
- 2.3 Appropriate consultation will always be sought through governance processes.

3. New doctoral programmes

- 3.1 New doctoral programmes that sit within these regulations are submitted for approval to the University Research Degree Committee (URDC).

4. Admissions

The University has clear criteria for research degree admission which are consistently applied. All applications are handled by NTU Doctoral School.

- 4.1 All admission decisions rest with the Interim Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) or nominee.
- 4.2 For all research degree programmes, the supervisory team is nominated by the relevant School.
- 4.3 Prospective candidates will be invited to interview prior to admission.

Requirements for PhD

- 4.4 Applicants for PhD should normally hold a first or upper second-class honours degree of a UK university or an equivalent qualification, or a lower second-class honours degree with a master's degree at Merit level from a UK university or an equivalent qualification.
- 4.5 An applicant not meeting the certificated requirement may be considered on merit using evidence of ability and background knowledge in relation to the proposed programme of research. Professional experience, publications, written reports or other appropriate evidence of accomplishment are taken into consideration.

Requirements for Professional Doctorates (ProfD)

- 4.6 Applicants will normally have already gained a related master's degree or equivalent qualification, together with sufficient professional experience in the relevant field.
- 4.7 In order to meet the learning outcomes of their Professional Doctorate (ProfD) course, it is anticipated that candidates may need to carry out detailed learning activities with one or more participating organisations. In such circumstances, access to and support from the appropriate organisation(s) is considered essential in terms of the initial selection of candidates.
- 4.8 During the admission process, prospective candidates are expected to develop an initial short proposal for subsequent research or equivalent enquiry. Evidence of sufficiency of problem definition, initial research, personal capability and appropriate professional experience are the main factors taken into consideration.
- 4.9 Specific entry criteria are set out in the course documentation.

Requirements for Doctorate by Published, Established or Creative works

- 4.10 The Doctorate by Published, Established or Creative works is open to candidates who are either:

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- a. Graduates of at least five years' standing; or
 - b. Current employees of an institution accredited for research degrees or of another research organisation recognised for this purpose by the Interim Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) or nominee of at least three years standing at the date of submission.
- 4.11 All applicants will be required to submit a proposal to the NTU Doctoral School which will be considered by the relevant School Research Degrees Committee.
- 4.12 The proposal would normally include:
- a. Details of the existing body of published or creative work to be considered for the research award; and
 - b. A one-thousand-word statement which sets out the significant contribution to knowledge; and
 - c. A statement which outlines the applicant's contribution to the body of the existing published or creative works.
- 4.13 The School Research Degrees Committee will make a recommendation to the NTU Doctoral School regarding the admission of the candidate.

Requirements for Higher Doctorates

- 4.14 Applicants for a Higher Doctorate award will normally be one of the following:
- a. A holder of at least seven years' standing of a first or upper second-class honours degree of a UK university or an equivalent qualification, or a lower second-class honours degree with a master's degree at Merit level of a UK university or an equivalent qualification; or
 - b. A of at least four years' standing of a higher degree awarded by a university in the United Kingdom or an equivalent qualification.
- 4.15 In addition, applicants are required to further satisfy one of the following criteria:
- a. A graduate of Nottingham Trent University; or
 - b. A member of academic staff at Nottingham Trent University; or
 - c. A person who can demonstrate their research is clearly and demonstrably focused within the University and/or through a collaborative partnership with the University.

5. English Language Requirements

- 5.1 The general requirement for admission to a doctoral programme is a minimum overall IELTS score of 6.5 (or equivalent) with a minimum of 6.0 in all components.

6. Recognition of prior learning

The University may recognise prior learning in order to admit a candidate onto a research degree or to admit a candidate with advanced standing beyond the beginning of the research degree.

- 6.1 All prospective transfer candidates are interviewed by the receiving Academic School.
- 6.2 Applicants who have already entered the completion year phase will not be admitted.
- 6.3 Where an applicant is admitted to a later point in the doctoral programme, then the registration period is adjusted accordingly.

Requirements for PhD

- 6.4 The School will assess prior research skills training and progression within the doctorate and will make a recommendation for admission of the candidate at an appropriate point in the doctoral programme.

Requirements for Professional Doctorates (ProfD)

- 6.5 An applicant who can demonstrate that they have achieved part of the learning outcomes of a Professional Doctorate (ProfD) course by other means can be admitted with credit to an appropriate point in the course.
- 6.6 Applicants who have already entered Phase Two of the course will not be admitted.
- 6.7 Admission with credit will not exceed 180 credits at level 7 and an additional 180 credits at level 8 (360 credits in total).

7. Undertaking a Doctorate at Distance

- 7.1 Doctoral candidates may be admitted to an at-distance doctoral programme. In this case, supervision and training will take place in an online environment.
- 7.2 Candidates who work for their research degrees remotely must normally spend at least eight weeks at Nottingham Trent University in any one academic year, so that they can establish personal relationships with supervisors and benefit from face-to-face participation in the academic community.

8. Registration periods

- 8.1 A doctoral candidate must re-enrol annually until conferment.
- 8.2 For the purposes of calculating maximum and minimum periods of registration, candidates' registration is deemed to run from the date on which they commence their research programme until the date of first thesis submission.

- 8.3 Maximum registration periods include any Thesis-Pending period.
- 8.4 The University does not stipulate normal periods of registration for its research degrees within the minimum and maximum. A candidate who has made unusually rapid progress with a programme of research may apply to the NTU Doctoral School for permission to submit a thesis in advance of the minimum period of registration set out above.
- 8.5 Candidates must submit within their approved period of registration.

Requirements for PhD

8.6 The minimum and maximum periods of registration are as follows:

Award		Minimum Length	Maximum Length
PhD	Full-time	24 months	48 months
	Part-time	48 months	96 months

- 8.7 Transfer to part-time registration within the first 24 months will only be granted by exception.
- 8.8 Transfer between mode of study and the thesis pending stage will normally be reviewed at annual monitoring points during the candidate's registration.
- 8.9 Where a candidate transfers from part-time to full-time registration, the equivalent period of full-time registration will be half that of the actual period of part-time registration remaining.

Requirements for Professional Doctorates (ProfD)

8.10 The minimum and maximum period of registration is as follows:

Award		Minimum Length	Maximum Length
ProfD	Part-time	48 months	96 months

Requirements for Doctorate by Published, Established or Creative works

8.11 The minimum and maximum periods of registration are as follows:

Award		Minimum Length	Maximum Length
Doctorate by Published, Established or Creative works	Part-time	12 months	24 months

9. Extensions to the registration period

- 9.1 The NTU Doctoral School may exceptionally extend a candidate's period of registration beyond the permitted maximum, because of circumstances beyond a candidate's control. This extension will not normally exceed one year.
- 9.2 Appropriate evidence is required to support requests for extension.
- 9.3 For short term illness, candidates can apply for an extension using the PGR Notification of Extenuating Circumstances guidance.

10. Suspension of studies

- 10.1 Where the candidate is prevented from making progress on the course, the registration may normally be suspended by the NTU Doctoral School for a period of not less than a month and not more than a year at a time.
- 10.2 The total number of suspensions a candidate is permitted should normally total no more than one third of the maximum registration period.

11. Withdrawal

- 11.1 Where a candidate has discontinued the course, the withdrawal of registration must be notified to the NTU Doctoral School.

12. Supervision

- 12.1 A research degree candidate has at least two, and normally not more than three, supervisors. At least two supervisors must be staff members at NTU.
- 12.2 For PhD candidates, one supervisor is designated as the Director of Studies.
- 12.3 For Professional Doctorate (ProfD) candidates, one supervisor is designated as the Lead Supervisor.
- 12.4 In both cases, the Director of Studies/Lead Supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the supervisory team and candidate adhere to the University Code of Practice and overseeing the research ethics and integrity, quality of the research and progress of the candidate.
- 12.5 Supervisory teams for research degree candidates will have experience of supervising at least one candidate to the successful completion of a UK research degree or equivalent international qualification, and where required have suitable professional knowledge and experience.
- 12.6 The following restrictions on appointment apply:
 - a. No supervisor should have any conflict of interest with the research degree candidate.
 - b. Staff members may not act as a Director of Studies or Lead Supervisor whilst they are currently registered for a doctoral degree. This does not apply to staff members registered for a Doctorate by Published, Established or Creative work.

- 12.7 A proposal for a change in supervision arrangements should be made through the NTU Doctoral School Online Monitoring and Progression App.
- 12.8 Any member of a supervisory team who has not previously supervised a research degree to completion at the University must attend the appropriate staff development course within six months of commencing supervision. Current staff supervising research degrees should attend a refresher of the appropriate staff development every three years.
- 12.9 Minimum expectations for the frequency of recorded supervisory meetings are once every month.

13. Monitoring requirements

- 13.1 Progression monitoring in all doctoral degrees is overseen by the relevant School Research Degrees Committee.
- 13.2 The progress of research degree candidates is monitored at least once in each year of registration (and during Phase Two for professional doctorate courses).
- 13.3 All research degree candidates are required to undertake an annual development needs analysis and participate in the University-wide professional development for research programme.
- 13.4 Minimum monitoring points are as follows:

Recommended Timeframe	Full-time	Part-time
6 months	Project Approval	N/A
12 months	Annual Review	Project Approval
24 months	Annual Review	Annual Review
36 months	Transfer to Thesis Pending	Annual Review
48 months	Submission	Annual Review
60 months		Annual Review
72 months		Transfer to Thesis Pending
84 months		Annual Review
96 months		Submission

Requirements for PhD

- 13.5 Candidates who, due to exceptional circumstances, are unable to meet the normal progression timeline, can by exception apply for an extension or suspension through the NTU Doctoral School Online Progression and Monitoring App.

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- 13.6 Where monitoring indicates serious concerns about progression of the candidate, the School Research Degrees Committee (SRDC) can apply a three-month period of probation (full-time equivalent) (see para. 22).
- 13.7 The candidate's progress will be reconsidered immediately after the probationary period. Where there is no improvement in progression, the School Research Degrees Committee may terminate the candidate's registration.
- 13.8 In the event of an unsatisfactory progression point, the SRDC may offer the candidate the opportunity to revise the application in the light of feedback from the panel. In the event that the progression point is not approved, the candidate will be required to re-register for an MPhil only.
- 13.9 A candidate 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 SRDC for their registration to revert to that for MPhil.

14. Project approval

- 14.1 All candidates must have the paperwork associated with the approval of their project submitted in time for the School Research Degrees Committee that occurs between six and nine months from the date of registration for a full-time candidate and 12 to 18 months from the date of registration for a part-time candidate.
- 14.2 In approving a project, the School Research Degrees Committee 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;
 - Plans for gaining ethical approval.
- 14.3 Where a project proposal is not approved, the candidate will normally be given an opportunity to seek approval for a revised project within three months (full-time equivalent).
- 14.4 If, having been given a three-month (full-time equivalent) opportunity to remedy defects, the proposal remains unsatisfactory, the School Research Degrees Committee can apply a further three-month (full time equivalent) period of probation.
- 14.5 Candidates who, after an additional two three-month (full time equivalent) periods, have not secured project approval may have their registration terminated by the School Research Degrees Committee.

Progression requirements for Professional Doctorates (ProfD)

15. Phase One results

15.1 All Phase One assessment grades remain provisional until confirmed by the School Research Degrees Committee.

16. Minimum pass

16.1 Phase One coursework is assessed on a pass/fail basis.

16.2 The minimum pass grade for a module is a pass.

17. Compensation

17.1 Compensation of marginal fail grades is not permissible on Professional Doctorate (ProfD) courses.

18. Assessment failure

18.1 Assessments submitted after the specified deadline and without a 'time extension' will be awarded a fail grade.

18.2 A candidate with a substantiated extenuating circumstance may apply for a 'time extension' to submit work after the official deadline.

19. Reassessment

19.1 The maximum permitted number of attempts normally allowed for a candidate to pass an assessment will be two.

19.2 For reassessment a candidate will either undertake a referral or an alternative assessment as determined by the School Research Degrees Committee.

20. Termination of Studies at Phase One

20.1 A School Research Degrees Committee is authorised to terminate a candidate's studies for the following reasons:

- a. The candidate has exhausted the total number of attempts;
- b. Major academic irregularities;
- c. Major irregularities in the research;
- d. The candidate has an overall poor record of performance, attendance, participation or commitment on the course and the School Research Degrees Committee judges that there are no grounds to permit the undertaking of further remedial or retake assessments.

21. Progression to Phase Two

21.1 A candidate will not be permitted to progress to Phase Two of the course until all summative assessments at Phase One have been passed.

22. Probation

22.1 A candidate who is deemed by School Research Degrees Committee to be making unsatisfactory progress, either at project approval or monitoring, can be placed on a three-month (full-time equivalent) probation.

22.2 The candidate's progress will be reconsidered immediately after the probationary period. Where there is no improvement in progression, the School Research Degrees Committee may terminate the candidate's registration.

22.3 Where a candidate has more than one probationary period during the period of registration, this may be taken into consideration when reviewing a candidate's progress.

23. Assessment

23.1 All doctorates are assessed in English.

Requirements for PhD

23.2 Achievement of a PhD, including Doctorate by Published, Established or Creative works, is assessed by the examination of the candidate's thesis and performance under oral examination.

23.3 Assessment is based on the candidate successfully demonstrating achievement of an appropriate descriptors for Level 8 doctoral degree qualifications in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ).

Requirements for Professional Doctorates (ProfD)

23.4 Achievement of professional doctorate awards is assessed by the examination of the candidate's Phase Two assessment and performance under oral examination.

23.5 Professional doctorate awards are assessed against the learning outcomes set out in the approved course specification, which are aligned to the descriptors for level 8 awards in the FHEQ.

23.6 Copies of the Phase One assessment will be sent to the examiners for reference purposes only. Examiners should not re-assess the Phase One assessment.

Requirements for Doctorate by Published, Established or Creative works

23.7 The degree of Doctorate by Published, Established or Creative works may be awarded on the basis of existing published or creative output that shows evidence of originality and independent critical judgement at the level appropriate for the

award. All work should normally have been published in the last ten years and have currency in the academic community (e.g. traceable in catalogues and/or peer-reviewed).

24. Examining teams

- 24.1 The examining team will comprise of an independent chair, internal examiner(s) and external examiner(s).
- 24.2 The examining team must have knowledge and understanding of QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) and doctoral degree characteristics.
- 24.3 The examining team should have substantial experience of successful supervision and examination of research degree candidates within the UK. Normally, the examining team should have completed a minimum of three examinations in the UK. The examining team will have experience in the specialist area of the candidate's work and demonstrate a consistent and recent record of relevant publication.

25. Independent Chair

- 25.1 The oral examination is chaired by an independent, experienced academic member of NTU staff.
- 25.2 The role of the chair is to ensure that the examination is conducted fairly and in compliance with the regulations.

26. Internal examiners

- 26.1 Internal examiners have experience in the general area of the candidate's work and normally have substantial experience of successful supervision and examination of research degree candidates.
- 26.2 An internal examiner will normally be a University staff member who is not part of the candidate's supervisory team.
- 26.3 The following restrictions on appointment apply:
 - a. An internal examiner should not previously have acted as the candidate's independent assessor;
 - b. A candidate currently enrolled on a research degree at the University cannot act as an internal examiner.
- 26.4 Where the candidate is a permanent member of University staff, a second external examiner is appointed in place of the internal examiner.

27. External examiners

- 27.1 An external examiner must have no conflict of interest with the research candidate. This precludes the following:

- a. A member of NTU staff (or member of staff at the collaborating organisation in the case of collaborative doctorate or dual award);
- b. The candidate's supervisor or adviser;
- c. A member of the Board of Governors or a University committee (or board or committee member at the collaborating organisation);
- d. An external examiner on a taught course in the same Academic School;
- e. A former NTU doctoral candidate or member of staff, unless a minimum of three years has elapsed;
- f. Any colleague who has been in a formal collaboration, or who has authored a research paper with a member of the supervisory team, within the three years prior to the examination;
- g. The same external examiner appointed to Phase One of the course for Professional Doctorate (ProfD).

Requirements for PhD and Professional Doctorates (ProfD)

27.2 All research degree candidates are examined by at least two and not more than three examiners, of whom at least one will be an external examiner.

Requirements for Doctorate by Published, Established or Creative works

27.3 A candidate will be examined by two external examiners.

28. Examination arrangements

28.1 The examination for research degrees will have two stages:

- a. Preliminary assessment of the thesis;
- b. Its defence by oral examination.

29. Alternative forms of examination

29.1 Where the candidate 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 the NTU Doctoral School.

30. Conduct of the oral examination

30.1 Recording of the oral examination is not permitted.

30.2 Where the University Research Degree Committee 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.

31. Candidates with disabilities

- 31.1 Reasonable adjustments to assessment arrangements will be made to ensure that candidates with disabilities are not disadvantaged.
- 31.2 Any agreed adjustments will be notified to the oral examination team by the NTU Doctoral School.

32. Outcomes for all research degrees

- 32.1 Following the completion of the oral examination, the examiners may recommend that the candidate on a doctorate 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 candidates, maximum 6 months for part-time candidates);
 - 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 candidates, maximum 12 months for part-time candidates);
 - 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 candidates, maximum 24 months for part-time candidates);
 - 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 (MPhil) where they meet the requirements of such an award.
- 32.2 Recommendation (e) should only be made in exceptional circumstances.
- 32.3 Where the examiners do not agree, separate reports and recommendations should be submitted.
- 32.4 The School Research Degrees Committee should consider the reports and recommendation(s) of the examiners in respect of the candidate and make a recommendation to the University Research Degree Committee.
- 32.5 The power to confer the degree rests with the Academic Board of the University but is delegated to the University Research Degree Committee.
- 32.6 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 University Research Degree Committee should be sought. Any such examination will be deemed to be part of the candidate's first examination.
- 32.7 Where the examiners' recommendations are not unanimous, the University Research Degree Committee may:
- Accept a majority recommendation (if the majority recommendation includes at least one external examiner); or
 - Accept the recommendation of the external examiner; or

- c. Require the appointment of an additional external examiner.
- 32.8 Where an additional external examiner is appointed, they should prepare an independent preliminary report on the basis of the thesis and may conduct a further oral examination, if they deem it necessary. The additional examiner should not be informed of the individual recommendations of the other examiners.
- 32.9 Where the University Research Degree Committee decides that the degree is not to be awarded and that no re-examination be permitted, the University Research Degree Committee should prepare a statement of the deficiencies of the thesis and the reason for their recommendation, which will be forwarded to the candidate.
- 32.10 A research degree may be awarded posthumously on the basis of a thesis completed by a candidate which is ready for submission for examination and likely to have been successful at oral examination.

33. Awards

- 33.1 Credit definition and outcomes for the Professional Doctorate (ProfD) are specified in the course documentation.
- 33.2 Where an interim award is specified, a candidate will normally be entitled to receive one award as a result of a continuous period of registration. Entitlement to an interim award is subject to assessment and oral examination.

34. Re-examination

- 34.1 A candidate who fails to satisfy the examiners at the first examination, may, on the recommendation of the examiners, be permitted to make corrections and amendments and be re-examined.
- 34.2 One re-examination is permitted, subject to the following requirements:
 - a. The examiners provide the candidate with written guidance on the deficiencies of the first submission.
 - b. The candidate submits for re-examination within the period of one calendar year for a full-time candidate and two calendar years for a part-time candidate from the date of the first examination.
- 34.3 The membership of the examining team should normally remain the same for the re-examination, unless otherwise agreed by the School Research Degrees Committee.
- 34.4 Reasonable adjustments to assessment arrangements should be notified to the NTU Doctoral School.
- 34.5 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 candidates, maximum 6 months for part-time candidates);

- 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 interim award.
- 34.6 Where the examiners' recommendations are not unanimous, the University Research Degrees Committee may:
- Accept a majority recommendation (provided that the majority recommendation includes at least one external examiner); or
 - Accept the recommendation of the external examiner; or
 - Require the appointment of an additional external examiner.
- 34.7 Where an additional external examiner is appointed, they should prepare an independent preliminary report on the basis of the thesis and may conduct a further oral examination, if they deem it necessary. That examiner should not be informed of the individual recommendations of the other examiners.
- 34.8 On receipt of the report from the additional examiner, the University Research Degree Committee will provide the final decision for the examination, with the School Research Degrees Committee agreeing the corrections and adjustments.
- 34.9 Where the University Research Degree Committee decides that the research degree 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.

Requirements for Doctorate by Published, Established or Creative works

- 34.10 A candidate may not resubmit for the award of Doctorate by Published, Established or Creative works until three years have elapsed from the date of the initial oral examination.

Policy owner
NTU Doctoral School

Change history			
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Sept 2020	16.09.20	01.10.20	Complete revision to reflect the research degree regulations changes approved at Academic Board (June 2020) Incorporates previous Sections 16D, 16E and 16F
Sept 2020	11.11.20	11.11.20	Minor updates made for clarity
Sept 2021	07.09.21	01.10.21	None

Equality Analysis		
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