

Procedures for the Submission and Examination of Theses for
Research Master Degree

June 2020

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1. Introduction to Submission and Examination of a Thesis for the award of Research Master Degree

- a) These regulations detail the roles of candidates and examiners to understand their contributions to, and roles in, the examination and the general procedures operated by the University.
- b) Except where shorter periods are specified in the regulations for specific degrees, a candidate for a Research Master Degree will be allowed a maximum of five years in the case of the College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences, three years in the case of Engineering, or four years in all other cases to submit their thesis. Candidates who do not submit their thesis within the prescribed number of years from the date of first registration for the programme for which they have been approved will require approval for extensions from the relevant College and must be registered at the time of thesis submission. A detailed review must be undertaken as outlined in the Progress Review Policy (<http://www.ucc.ie/en/graduatestudies/policies/>) and must accompany the request for an extension.
- c) A candidate must pursue a programme of supervised research and have completed their approved period of registration in order to submit a thesis for Research Master Degree. It is a University requirement that all current Master students are registered until their thesis is submitted for examination.
- d) A Master degree is awarded to suitably qualified candidates who prepare a thesis describing original research which is their own work. There are a number of different Research Master degree qualifications in UCC (e.g., MSc, MPhil, M Eng Science, MRes).
- e) The candidate may also be required to pass an examination on the subject matter of the thesis.
- f) The examination board consists of examiners who are both internal and external to the University, with the external examiner being an expert in the field of study of the thesis.

2. Preparing Research Master Thesis

- a) Drafts of the thesis should be prepared under the guidance of the Supervisor(s). The thesis format should conform to disciplinary norms within the University. In addition, feedback the candidate may have received during their research programme (e.g., through monitoring by a Graduate Studies

Committee and/or Thesis Committee) may be useful in terms of the expectations of the likely content and format of the eventual thesis. Students registered for a Master's by Research programme will be required to undertake a progress review if they are registered for more than one calendar year, as per UCC [Progress Review Policy for Research Students](#).

- b) Plagiarism in research degree theses constitutes a very significant breach of examination regulations. Supervisors should make students aware of all aspects of plagiarism in preparation of their thesis. Students should familiarise themselves with the [Procedure for Investigating Allegations of Plagiarism in Research Theses](#).
- c) The use of external professional individuals or organisations for proof-reading, copy-editing of theses or other services on a paid basis is not permitted. Candidates found to have engaged such assistance in preparing their thesis will be deemed to be in breach of examination regulations.
- d) Candidates should familiarise themselves with the norms that apply in their School/Department with regard to structure/style, content, word count, and academic referencing convention.

For example, In the case of the College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences, the length of an MPhil Degree thesis should normally be approximately 40,000 words.

In the case of the College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences, the length of an MRes thesis should normally be approximately 25,000 words.

- e) When a thesis is submitted, a signed declaration must be included, stating that the thesis submitted is the candidate's own work and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere. This declaration must explicitly make reference to the fact that the candidate is aware of the importance of plagiarism and that the text presented for examination does not include plagiarised material. The following wording must be used:

This is to certify that the work I am submitting is my own and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere. All external references and sources are clearly acknowledged and identified within the contents. I have read and understood the regulations of University College Cork concerning plagiarism.

Digital signature of the candidate: _____

3. The Examination of Research Master Degrees

- a) The Examination Board normally consists of an external examiner and an internal examiner for each thesis.
- b) If the candidate is a member of UCC academic staff, or a permanent member of staff of the University, or holds an employment contract of 3 or more years, either full-time or part-time, there will be a second external examiner. For the purposes of this regulation, a candidate will not be classified as a part-time member of staff where:
 - I. they only carry out work for the School/Department pursuant to a student support scheme or
 - II. they are paid on an hourly basis, and, in the opinion of the Head of School/Department is not such as to justify the application of the rule requiring an additional external examiner.
- c) In the case of theses in inter-disciplinary fields, where a reasoned academic case may be made that a broader diversity of academic expertise is required to examine the thesis, the examination board may be extended to include an additional internal and/or external examiner, to a maximum of four examiners in total.
- d) The examiners are nominated by the Head of School/Department following consultation with the supervisors and other relevant expertise where appropriate (e.g., Head of Discipline). The nomination is approved by the appropriate Head of College Graduate School. In the case of any conflict of interest by the Head of School/Department (e.g. if the Head is also a supervisor), the nomination should be made by the Head of College. In the case of a conflict of interest by the Head of College, the nomination should be made by the Deputy President and Registrar.
- e) The external examiner should have a strong track-record in the research field of the thesis and will have experience of examining Research Master theses in UCC or elsewhere. The Head of School/Department must satisfy themselves as to the expertise of proposed external examiner(s) in the subject of the thesis and an examiner nomination form (*Approval of Examiners Form*) must be fully completed for each proposed external examiner so that an informed decision can be made.

- f) The internal examiner is expected to have sufficient knowledge and understanding of the subject area of the research topic to enable them to judge the quality of the thesis. The internal examiner is expected to play a full part in determining the outcome of the examination. The Head of School/Department must satisfy themselves as to the experience of the proposed internal examiner(s) and an examiner nomination form (*Approval of Examiners Form*) must be fully completed for each proposed internal examiner so that an informed decision can be made.
- g) There must be no conflict of interest, whether personal, professional or commercial, between the proposed examiners of a thesis and the candidate, supervisor, University or subject matter. Specific examples of circumstances which may lead to a conflict of interest include, but are not limited to, the following:
- I. Formal association between the external examiner and UCC (e.g., as staff member or student) within the past five years;
 - II. A personal or family relationship with the candidate or supervisor(s);
 - III. Co-authorship of publications with the candidate;
 - IV. Collaboration with the candidate in the work described in the thesis;
 - V. Acting as external examiner for a thesis by the same supervisor in the past three years, unless a strong reasoned case for this being the best examiner for the thesis is presented;
 - VI. Commercial interest in the work described in the thesis;
 - VII. Acting in the past, or near future, as an employer of the candidate;
 - VIII. Substantial contact with the candidate or supervisor in any other circumstance which might jeopardise the independence of the examination.
- h) Any requests for deviation from the regulations on the composition of the Examination Board must be approved by the Chair of Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee.

4. Submission Procedure

- a) In consultation with supervisor(s), the candidate submits an *Intention to Submit* online to the Graduate Studies Office at least three months before the likely date of submission. Failure to do this will delay the examination.

- b) Once the *intention to submit* process has been completed the Graduate Studies Office contacts the Head of School/Department, to ensure that the *Approval of Examiners Form* is fully completed (including examiner biographical details and if an examiner requires a paper copy of the thesis). The form is then emailed by the Head of School/Department to the relevant College Graduate School for approval. Once approved, the form is uploaded by the College office to a OneDrive folder which is shared with the Graduate Studies Office for processing.
- c) When the final draft of the thesis is ready, it is submitted online to the Graduate Studies Office along with the *Submission for Examination Form* signed (digital signature) by the supervisor(s) and Head of School/Department. This form not only confirms approval that the thesis is ready to be submitted for examination but also confirms access conditions for the final thesis when uploaded to CORA (the UCC Institutional Repository). Where an examiner has requested a paper copy, the candidate will submit this to the Graduate Studies Office at the same time as the e-thesis submission. Any candidate who believes that such a signature(s) has been unreasonably withheld may still submit their thesis, but must be notified in writing by the Head of School/Department that this is against the advice of the School/Department. In such cases, the supervisor(s) must submit an independent report to the Head of School/Department outlining the reasons for not supporting submission. The Head of School/Department (or Head of the College Graduate School if the Head is a supervisor of the student in question) should email this report to the Head of the Graduate Studies Office. This will then be considered alongside the report(s) arising from the examination by the Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee before a final recommendation is made to Academic Board on the result of the examination of the thesis. In cases where the thesis is rejected or failed, the Graduate Studies Office will notify examiners of the fact that the supervisor(s) did not approve submission of the thesis after the examination is complete.
- d) No changes may be made to the e-thesis after online submission to the Graduate Studies Office. The external and internal examiners may not communicate with the candidate about the thesis in the period between the submission of the thesis for examination and the completion of the examination process.
- e) The Graduate Studies Office will send the thesis to all examiners, along with a link to the *Procedures for Submission and Examination of Research Master Degrees*. Details of the dates of meetings of the

Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee, to which reports should be returned, will also be included.

- f) The process of reading and examining the thesis should take a maximum of three months.

5. Oral Examination

- a) There is not normally a *viva voce* examination for Research Masters theses, but if all examiners request this, the Internal Examiner should contact the Chair of the Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee for guidance and approval, and procedures to be followed should be as described in the *UCC Procedures for the Submission and Examination of Theses for Doctoratus Philosophiae (PhD)*.

6. Award of Research Master Degrees

- a) When considering the thesis under examination, the examiners may give particular attention to the following (subject to the nature of the discipline(s) in question, and being mindful of the national and European descriptors for Level 9 qualifications):
 - i. Does the thesis demonstrate a systematic understanding of knowledge at, or informed by, the forefront of a field of learning?
 - ii. Does the thesis demonstrate a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, generally informed by the forefront of a field of learning?
 - iii. Has the candidate demonstrated a range of standard and specialised research or equivalent tools and techniques of enquiry?
 - iv. Was appropriate methodology adopted?
 - v. Has the candidate demonstrated that they can select from complex and advanced skills across a field of learning and developed new skills to a high level, including novel and emerging techniques? If a new methodology has been developed, has it been tested and validated appropriately?
 - vi. Has the candidate demonstrated an ability to integrate knowledge, handle complexity to inform judgements?

- vii. Is the candidate familiar with other published work in the field and can the candidate summarise the work of other authors so as to synthesise an appropriate theoretical framework for the work described in the thesis?
- viii. If relevant, were all ethical requirements met?
- ix. Are results interpreted appropriately? Are reasonable conclusions reached based on the evidence presented in the thesis? If relevant, have appropriate statistical methods been employed? Does the candidate appreciate the significance of the results and do conclusions reached take into account relevant published findings by other authors?

Presentation of the thesis:

- x. Are results presented appropriately and in a clear and accessible way? Are all tables, figures and plates, where included, adequately annotated and correctly referenced in the text?
 - xi. Is the bibliography complete, comprehensive and up-to-date? Is it referenced appropriately in the text with a recognised citation style?
 - xii. Where the candidate worked as part of a research team, does the thesis clearly identify the individual contribution of the candidate to the overall research project?
- b) A supervisor(s) may be invited by the examiners to clarify any issues identified during their consideration of the thesis and, if necessary, bring to the attention of the examiners any additional information which may be relevant (e.g., the nature of decisions taken at intermediate stages in the research programme). The examiners must ensure that they have all the information they need on which to base their judgement.
- c) All examiners will consult and prepare a joint written report on the thesis after the *viva voce* examination, using the electronic template supplied by the Graduate Studies Office. The internal examiner will submit this joint report to the Graduate Studies Office for consideration by the Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee. Where the examiners are not in agreement, the internal examiner must ensure that separate reports are made and submitted to the Graduate Studies Office for consideration by the Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee. The independent Chair will sign the examination report form confirming that the *viva voce* examination was conducted in a fair and appropriate manner. Any concerns regarding the conduct of the examination must be detailed in writing to the chair of the Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee.

- d) The Examination Board must recommend one of the following results:
- i. **Award, no amendments needed** (the degree is awarded without any changes).
 - ii. **Award, on condition minor amendments are carried out.** This includes minor recommendations that do not significantly affect the argument and/or conclusions of the thesis (such as typographical errors, minor changes in phraseology, inclusion of additional minor points of discussion, or correction or updating of the bibliography). These amendments should be verified to the Graduate Studies Office by the internal examiner in writing and as a general guideline should be completed within 3 months of the Examination. The supervisor(s) will play a supporting role in ensuring that this process is brought to completion.
 - iii. **Award, on condition major amendments are carried out,** i.e. the thesis requires substantial modification including rewriting of parts of chapters or sections of the thesis, introduction of new material, further experiments or calculations, analysis or data. The modifications required should be such as to make the thesis acceptable but would not normally require another *viva voce* examination. Confirmation that these amendments have been completed to the satisfaction of all examiners (external and internal) should be submitted to the Graduate Studies Office by all examiners in writing. As a general guideline these changes should be completed within 6 months of the examination. The supervisor(s) will play a supporting role in ensuring that this process is brought to completion. Should the amendments recommended not be made to the satisfaction of the examiners or within the given timeframe, the award may be changed from Award on condition major amendments are carried out to a **Reject judgement**.
 - iv. **Reject, but permit the submission of a revised thesis,** i.e., a major rewrite of all or a significant part of the thesis, leading to a new thesis being submitted to the Graduate Studies Office for examination. This may include substantial rewriting of parts of the thesis, including introduction of new research and appropriate correction of an inherently flawed and unsound argument or methodology. The modification(s) would normally be so great as to require re-examination. If the candidate is not capable, in the opinion of the examiners, of carrying out such a significant revision of the thesis, then option (V) or (VI) is preferable. This process should normally be completed within 12 months of the examination, during which time the candidate must be registered as a Research Master student and the revised thesis should be submitted to the Graduate Studies Office. The Supervisor(s) will play a supporting role in ensuring that this process is brought to completion. In the case of theses for which a grade is awarded, the grade which will be recorded

for a thesis rejected and resubmitted, following acceptance of the changes by the Examiners, is Pass.

- v. **Reject. No degree is awarded as the thesis is very seriously and inherently deficient.** In this case the examiners must be of the opinion that the deficiencies of the thesis are such that it is reasonable to suppose that the candidate will not be in a position to bring it up to Research Master standard within a reasonable time. Examiners should be convinced that this is the only decision open to them.
- e) Reports submitted to the Graduate Studies Office for consideration by Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee must be made on the electronic form provided by the Graduate Studies Office and:
- I. give an indication of the content of the thesis, its contribution to knowledge and the quality of its presentation;
 - II. comment on the candidate's performance in the *viva voce* examination;
 - III. indicate, where appropriate, the nature and extent of any amendments that are required to the thesis;
 - IV. clearly indicate a recommendation of result
 - V. typically be a minimum of 500 words in length;
 - VI. be sufficiently clear and informative to allow Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee to make a recommendation to Academic Board;
 - VII. be a joint report and signed by all examiners
- f) The Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee has delegated authority to approve examiner reports and recommend the conferral of research degrees to Academic Board. The Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee may refer back to the examiners if the information given is not sufficiently complete to enable the committee to reach a decision on the recommendation of the examiners, or if any of the required elements in the report (e.g. a formal indication of a recommended result, an examiner's signature) is missing. If the report does not justify the recommendation made, the Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee may recommend an alternative judgement to the examiners.

- g) The Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee makes a recommendation to the Academic Board as to the award of the degree or otherwise. The candidate will be notified in writing of the result after consideration by Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee, subject to final approval by Academic Board.
- h) The supervisor(s) is responsible for overseeing the amendments required by the examiners. The award of the degree will not be made until all amendments have been made to the satisfaction of the internal examiner and, if required (as in the case of major amendments), the internal and external examiners.
- i) Once the amendments have been carried out, and confirmation in writing from the examiners to the Graduate Studies Office that the amendments have been carried out to their satisfaction, the candidate uploads the final electronic (PDF) thesis version to [CORa](https://cora.ucc.ie/) (UCC Boole Library institutional repository, <https://cora.ucc.ie/>). The candidate is then notified by the Graduate Studies Office that they are now eligible to graduate at the next conferring ceremony. The thesis will then be lodged in the Boole Library and the access rights as agreed by the candidate and supervisor(s) in the *Thesis Submission Form* (page 8 above) will be applied (see: <https://libguides.ucc.ie/theses/access>).
- j) Staff and students should familiarize themselves with the full online instructions for research thesis submission and examination:
<https://www.ucc.ie/en/study/postgrad/currentresearchstudents/thesis/researchmastersthesissubmissionsteps/>

7. Appeals

Candidates may appeal a result by following the procedures of the University; see

https://www.ucc.ie/en/media/studyatucc/postgraduate-gsomedialibrary/3policydocuments/V1_Appeals_Process_Research_Degrees.pdf.

Appendix

Grade descriptors for Research Masters theses for which an Honours grade is recommended

The following grade descriptors will apply to all Research Masters programmes for which a differentiated award is given.

First Class Honours

Excellent performance, engaging closely and systematically with a clear research question or questions, with strong evidence of the following:

- A comprehensive mastery of the subject matter, reflecting deep and broad knowledge and understanding as well as extensive reading, ably supported by evidence and relevant citation;
- An excellent ability to organise, analyse and express arguments fluently and lucidly with a high level of critical analysis;
- A highly-developed capacity for original, creative and logical thinking.

Second Class Honours

Very good performance, engaging substantially with the research question or questions, and demonstrating some or all of the following:

- A strong grasp of the subject matter, well supported by evidence and relevant citation;
- A well-developed capacity to analyse issues, organise material, present arguments clearly and cogently;
- Some original insights and capacity for creative and logical thinking.

Pass

Satisfactory performance – an intellectually adequate thesis with evidence of familiarity with the relevant primary and secondary sources, but suffering from some or all of the following defects:

- A basic grasp of the subject matter, but somewhat lacking in focus and structure • Main points covered in thesis, but lacking detail
- Some effort to engage, but only a basic understanding of the topic portrayed • Limited development of argument
- Only some critical awareness displayed
- Insufficient evidence or relevant citation included 14
- Appearance of errors, though not on a scale indicating a Fail judgment
- Lacking evidence of capacity for original and logical thinking

- Poor use of language
- Sub-standard level of citation