



University of
St Andrews

Assessment of postgraduate research students

Document type	Policy
Scope (applies to)	PGR only
Applicability date	31/05/2016
Review date	30/08/2028
Approved date	26/08/2025
Approver	Senate Policies
Document owner	Deputy Head of Education Policy and Quality
School / unit	Education and Student Experience
Document status	Published
Information classification	Public
Equality impact assessment	None
Key terms	Academic policies/Assessment, examination and award/Assessment of PGRs
Purpose	Details the rules and regulations governing the assessment of postgraduate research students.

Version number	Purpose / changes	Document status	Author of changes, role and school / unit	Date
1.8	Addition of information to support students with disabilities. Change of timeline for internal examiners where theses have been corrected or revised.	Approved	Deputy Head of Education Policy and Quality	26/08/2025

1. Rules for the submission of dissertations / theses / portfolios

1.1 Forms and presentation of masters and doctoral submissions

All dissertations, theses or portfolios submitted for a research degree should meet the requirements set out in the [Postgraduate Senate Regulations](#). With the exception of submissions by portfolio (see [student policy](#) or [staff policy](#)), single- or multi-authored papers may not be directly reproduced or repeated as a standard chapter, although they may be included as appendices. However, chapters based on published work may be included in a postgraduate research thesis, as long as:

- the relevant publication(s) and collaborations are acknowledged and cited;
- the author of the thesis is the major contributing author of the material that is included in the thesis;
- the material is integrated in to the structure and narrative of the thesis.

1.2 Variation of word limit

The word limits indicated in the [Postgraduate Senate Regulations](#) will be strictly observed. The stated word limits include all elements of the thesis or portfolio apart from the bibliography and appendices.

Any exception to the word limit must be presented to the Associate Provost Students for consideration. Reasons for the request should be fully stated, and a letter of support from the principal supervisor must accompany the request.

Theses submitted in excess of the word limit, without prior approval from the Associate Provost Students, will not be accepted for examination.

1.3 Appendices

Appendices may include text or material on which the dissertation or portfolio is a comment such as:

- original sources or texts
- comparative translations
- visual materials
- descriptions of experiments or lab setups
- field notes
- descriptions of participant information and sample surveys
- calculations on which the argument of the thesis is based
- computer code
- logic proofs
- ethical approval documents
- uncleared copyright material which may need to be redacted from the final electronic thesis

Appendices do not count towards the maximum word limit of the thesis and therefore should not be used to house material which is core to the central work of the thesis. Underpinning research data are not considered to be an appendix for the purpose of this policy.

Underlying data and software which are not essential for understanding and assessing the argument of the thesis but which may support validation of the results must be deposited in the data repository (Pure) for reasons of integrity, transparency and the FAIR principles of good data stewardship.

When one or more appendices are included with a thesis, both the student and supervisor must sign the appropriate declaration confirming that the appendices only contain material in line with the policy above. The Associate Provost Students should be consulted for any questions regarding what can be included in an appendix.

1.4 Variation of format of thesis submission

Where appropriate, research students may apply to the Associate Provost Students for part or all of a research thesis to be submitted as a paper copy, with or without a corresponding electronic copy. Reasons for the request should be fully stated, and a letter of support from the principal supervisor must accompany the request.

1.5 Submission of PhD thesis in foreign language

The languages other than English which may normally be permitted for the submission of a PhD are those inextricably associated with a particular academic discipline taught in the University, in which (in addition to the usual scholarly qualities) native or near-native proficiency in the language is expected of PhD graduates. These languages are, at the present time: French, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish.

Submission in a language other than English will be considered for the degree of PhD. It is expected that the thesis for all other research degrees will normally be written in English, even for degrees in the Modern Languages. Only in circumstances where a PhD thesis was written with permission in a foreign language, and was not deemed satisfactory, may a thesis be submitted for a lower degree award in a language other than English.

Special permission to submit the thesis in a language other than English must be sought from the Associate Provost Students, in a reasoned case presented by the school's Director of Postgraduate Research Studies, accompanied by written statements by the candidate and the supervisor. The reasoning should normally refer to the following points, as a minimum:

- confirmation that the candidate is enrolled for doctoral study in the School of Modern Languages, and that the request has the support of the school;
- an evaluation of the candidate's competence to complete the thesis in the language proposed;
- confirmation that the thesis will contain very substantial references to cultural material (film, text, speech, etc) generated in the language of study;
- confirmation that submission in the language of study will enhance the international accessibility of the research to other scholars within the discipline of study as a whole;
- confirmation of the availability of appropriately qualified supervisors and internal/external examiners.

The following will apply:

- No argument will be accepted that is based on a candidate's relative inability to write in English.
- Permission must be sought as early as possible and at all events by the end of the first year of study.
- Permission to change languages will not normally be granted after more than one year of full-time study.
- In addition to the thesis itself, a thesis written in a language other than English must be accompanied by a summary of 2,000 to 3,000 words in English as well as the usual 300-word abstract.
- The oral part of the examination will be conducted in English, and the candidate must demonstrate an ability to hold a linguistically accurate discussion of the research in an appropriately academic register.
- In addition to the title in a language other than English, the thesis must bear an English translation of the title. Both titles will appear in all official documentation.
- External examiners will be notified of the language of the thesis before they are appointed.
- The linguistic accuracy, stylistic qualities and scholarly presentation of a thesis in a language other than English will be judged in the same way as they would be in English.
- None of the above points should hinder co-tutelle arrangements in any faculty which stipulate that a thesis may be submitted in the language of a partner institution.

1.6 Submission of thesis and electronic publication of theses

All research students will submit their thesis electronically. PhD/MPhil students should submit their thesis for examination (including resubmission following corrections) in [Moodle](#). The submission of final copies to the Library is electronic only and is made into the [St Andrews Research Repository](#). Please see the guidance on [electronic thesis submission](#) for further information.

It is the University's intention to support the appropriate dissemination of research material by electronic means. Supervisors and students should therefore think carefully about the [copyright](#) and [intellectual property](#) consequences of their work from the outset, and the Library and GRADskills will offer advice and training. The copyright of a thesis normally belongs to the author, but students must still complete their declarations via MySaint. Students are required to submit both a preservation and dissemination version of their final copies to enable the [digital preservation](#) of their submissions. Students should ensure that their final copies comply with the current University guidance on [digital accessibility](#).

At the point of the submission of a thesis for examination, the candidate and supervisor must fill in the section of the declaration (see [additional guidance](#)) which relates to embargoes of work where publication would have commercial, professional, legal or ethical consequences. Embargoes of all or part of the thesis

must be accompanied by a brief justification. The standard maximum embargo period is five years in the first instance.

MSc(Res) and MSt(Res) students will submit their final thesis electronically via MMS. MSc(Res) and MSt(Res) students are not required to submit a final copy of their thesis to the library.

2. Examination of Research students

2.1 Nature of assessment

Theses, dissertations and portfolios submitted for any research degree are to be assessed in accordance with the relevant [Postgraduate Senate Regulations](#).

The purpose of the oral examination is to:

- Ensure the candidate's authorship of the thesis;
- Discuss points arising from the examiners' reading;
- Discuss the wider context of the candidate's specific area of research;
- Clarify areas of uncertainty or doubt.

The University expects work at postgraduate research level to be scholarly, substantial, significant and lucid.

Students with a disability may need reasonable adjustments as per the guidance set out in the [Academic adjustments guidance document: reasonable adjustments for postgraduate research students](#) and should initiate discussion with Student Services at the earliest opportunity, and at least two months in advance of their viva taking place.

2.2 Examining committees and their operation

i. The appointment of the Examining Committees

The relevant Head of School, after consultation with the supervisor(s), must nominate an examination committee at least 6 weeks prior to submission of the thesis. There may be delays in the examination process if the committee has not been nominated by the School and agreed by the Associate Provost Students by the time the thesis is submitted. Nomination forms for an Examination Committee should be signed either by the Head of School or by the Director of Postgraduate Research Studies under the authority of the Head of School. Candidates should be given the opportunity to comment on the composition of the examination committee. Candidates do not have a right of veto, but may appeal to the Associate Provost Students if there is no resolution of a dispute at school level.

The Committee should consist of at least two examiners:

- An internal examiner who is a permanent member of staff of the University. The internal examiner will normally also act as the Convenor.
- An external examiner

In some situations, such as when two external examiners are appointed, a separate Convenor may be nominated to ensure that all processes and regulations are

observed. Where the candidate is an employee of the University, the examining committee shall consist of an internal examiner who shall act as convenor and two external examiners.

The following applies to the appointment of external examiners:

- Only persons of seniority and experience who are able to command authority in the relevant field of study should be appointed. Appointees should normally hold, or have recently held, an academic appointment in a University.
 - In certain circumstances, however, it may be appropriate to appoint from outside the higher education system, e.g. from industry or the professions, or from the higher education systems of other countries.
- There should be no significant conflicts of interest in the appointment, such as any on-going joint research between the external examiner and supervisor or student.
- If the external examiner is resident abroad, the school should explicitly state, as part of the nomination and approval process, that it is willing to pay the cost of travel to St Andrews if the examiner plans to attend in person.
- Former St Andrews members of staff or research students should not be invited to become external examiners before at least four years have elapsed.
- Members of other Universities who are part of pooling arrangements which relate to the candidate's area of study may not normally act as external examiners.
- Academic staff from Edinburgh and Stirling Universities who are part of the EastChem pool and SASP (St Andrews and Stirling Graduate Programme in Philosophy) may act as internal examiners for PhD students in St Andrews.

The following applies to the appointment of internal examiners and Convenors:

- Convenors of examination committees should be academic or academic related members of staff of the University who will not be retiring or departing the University up to six months after the expected date of submission. In some cases, e.g. if a member of staff knowledgeable in the subject area is not available, two external examiners should be appointed with an internal Convenor to administer the examination process.
- Convenors are responsible for arranging the date of the oral examination and informing Registry and the school's Director of Postgraduate Research Studies. The Convenor is responsible for assuring that the oral examination takes place in an appropriate setting, that the candidate is given the opportunity to answer reasonable questions, and that on conclusion all appropriate forms are completed.
- For the MD (by research thesis), the examining committee shall be a Convenor and two external examiners. Where a member of university staff is submitting for any higher degree by thesis or dissertation the examining committee should contain two external examiners and an internal examiner who should act as Convenor.
- A supervisor may not be appointed to an examination committee and is not permitted to attend the oral examination even as an observer.

- As an internal examiner, the Convenor should be sufficiently distant from the candidate and supervisor, both academically and personally, to ensure an impartial and objective opinion of the thesis. It is accepted, however, that in small departments there will inevitably have been some academic interaction between the Convenor and candidate.

ii. Viva formats

The viva will be delivered in one of three formats, as agreed by the examining committee in advance: fully in-person, fully online, or hybrid with both online and in-person attendance. The student should be consulted in determining the viva format, but will not normally be able to veto the examining committee's preferred format.

The convenor of the examining committee must ensure that the examination is conducted in accordance with the guidance given in [Use of videoconferencing in a Viva](#) if the examination is conducted fully or partially online.

A note of the viva format should be included in the examiners' final report.

iii. Procedures followed by the examining committee

The principal supervisor should inform the examining committee of any special circumstances that may have affected the student's performance during the period of study.

The examination of a thesis should normally be completed within three months of the date of submission. If the examining committee is unable to convene within three months, then the Associate Provost Students may either authorise a short extension or advise that a new committee should be appointed.

Examiners are expected to prepare independent written reports on the thesis prior to the oral examination, and they should express a provisional judgement on the thesis in these reports. If academic misconduct is suspected then the [Good Academic Practice Policy](#) should be followed

Examiner's reports should be submitted at least five working days before the oral examination to Registry, which will make them available to the Convenor of the examining committee only when all reports have been received. In order to maintain independence, examiners should not confer with one another about the thesis or their judgements prior to all reports having been submitted. These reports will remain confidential unless requested as part of a freedom of information request or appeal.

iv. The Recommendations of the examining committee

After examination, the examining committee may make a recommendation from the relevant options set out in the [Postgraduate Senate Regulations](#).

The examiners may tell the candidate their recommendation informally during or after the oral examination, but the candidate will be notified officially of the result of the examination only after the Associate Provost Students has approved the recommendation of the examining committee.

The examiners must prepare an agreed final report which will be made available by the Convenor to the candidate within two weeks of the examination regardless of the result, containing any recommendations for changes before resubmission, reasons for referral, and commentary on the future direction of successful theses.

If there are minor revisions to be made to the thesis, these will be conveyed to the candidate in writing by the Convenor. Note that the supervisor's role does not end after the examination and that the supervisor should offer guidance to the candidate on achieving the required revisions. The revised thesis should then be examined by the internal examiner within four weeks of receipt of the revised thesis. The convenor is responsible for reporting to Registry via MySaint that the corrections or revisions have been successfully completed.

Where the thesis is more seriously flawed and the examining committee has recommended a resubmission for the same degree after major revision or award of a lower degree, the candidate must receive written feedback which provides a detailed list of corrections and revisions deemed necessary by the examiners. The candidate shall be expected to take these into account in any resubmission of the thesis.

The award of a lower degree may only be made where the examiners are convinced that the thesis fulfils completely the requirements for that degree, and may not be recommended purely as a compensatory award.

Students who are required to revise and resubmit the thesis will be permitted an increased maximum word limit of 35,000 for Masters by Research degrees, 45,000 for Taught MPhils and MFAs, 70,000 for MPhils by research, and 90,000 words for doctoral degrees. In such cases, the supervisor continues to have an important role after the examination. The supervisor should offer guidance to the candidate, in consultation with the Convenor or, where necessary, the other members of the examining committee, on achieving the required changes.

When the examiners have recommended that the degree should be awarded, an electronic copy of the final thesis must be deposited in the [University Library](#) before the student is able to graduate.

A candidate who is dissatisfied with the result of an examination has the right of appeal and details of the appeals procedure can be obtained from the Senate/Court Office, see the policies on [Student Academic Appeals](#) and [Academic Complaints](#).

2.3 Examination for MSc(Res) and MSt(Res) students

The thesis for a Master of Science by Research or Master of Studies by Research degree should be submitted electronically. Each thesis will be examined by at least two internal examiners as assigned by the School. The examination of a thesis should normally be completed within three months of the date of submission. The examiners will jointly agree an outcome from the options set out in the [Postgraduate Senate Regulations](#). In most cases an oral examination will not be required, although the examiners may request that an oral examination take place if they deem it necessary. All outcomes will be moderated by an external examiner.

Version number	Purpose / changes	Document status	Author of changes, role and school / unit	Date
1.0	Converting policy previously held on a webpage to a standalone document. Amended to include examination procedures for MSc(Res) and MSt(Res) students.		Emily Feamster, Academic Policy Officer, Principal's Office	6/6/2019
1.1	Increased flexibility for the use of videoconferencing in a viva, including the option for all participants to join remotely in exceptional circumstances.		Emily Feamster, Academic Policy Officer, Principal's Office	6/7/2020
1.2	Provision for remote thesis submission and examination for AY20/21		Emily Feamster, Academic Policy Officer, Principal's Office	23/7/2020
1.3	Amended section dealing with word limits, and introduced a section clarifying the use of appendices.		Emily Feamster, Academic Policy Officer, Principal's Office	7/1/2021
1.4	Changes to Associate Provost titles		Emily Feamster, Academic Policy Officer, Principal's Office	3/8/2021
1.5	Updated to allow for remote or hybrid vivas, and digital thesis submission.		Emily Feamster, Academic Policy Officer, Principal's Office	22/6/2022
1.6	Updated links		Emily Feamster, Academic Policy Officer, Principal's Office	27/01/2023
1.7	Inclusion of some information previously held in Senate Regulations	Approved	Emily Feamster, Deputy Head of Education Policy and Quality	04/08/2023
1.8	Addition of information to support students with disabilities.	Approved	Deputy Head of Education Policy and Quality	26/08/2025

	Change of timeline for internal examiners where theses have been corrected or revised.			
--	--	--	--	--