

Policy for Theses in Research Degree Programmes



Policy owner Graduate Studies/
Assessment,
Registry

**Approval date and
body**

Initial approval:
Academic Council
23rd April 2010

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1. Purpose

The purpose of the policy is to clearly identify the responsibilities of each party within the University with respect to the preparation, submission, processing, examination, and dissemination of graduate research degree theses.

2. Definitions

Regulations for Research Degrees: are the regulations by which all academic research programmes of the University are governed, the purpose of which is to assure and enhance the quality of education and training arising from research degrees, and to create a framework that guides and supports the student and their supervisor(s). This policy should be read in conjunction with them.

Academic Council Committee on Examinations (ACCE): acts, on behalf of the University, as an Examination Board for all doctoral and research degrees (PhDs, Professional Doctorates, Research Master's and MDs) and to award, on behalf of the University, all research degrees.

Governing Board: All programmes in the University are overseen by a Governing Board, which is responsible for monitoring the overall performance and progression of students registered to its programmes and to ensure their welfare. Governing Boards are established by Academic Council.

Research Studies Panel (RSP): The RSP comprises the Principal Supervisor/Co-supervisor and at least two advisors. The purpose of the RSP is to provide advice, monitor the progress of the student, and support the supervisor(s)-student relationship.

Thesis: A thesis is the final document, containing the context, nature, methodology and the outcomes of the research, that is submitted by a student to the University for examination in support of their candidature for a doctoral or master's degree. A thesis is a factual, logical, and possibly sequential record of the research work on a specific problem, carried out over an extended period of time. It clearly specifies the research problem and the work carried out to reach a solution and the results obtained. A research master's thesis must demonstrate the attainment of skills and competencies in research. Doctoral theses must contain material of a publishable standard according to international best practice and norms within the candidate's field of study.

eThesis Examination System: The eThesis examination system is a secure electronic University system through which students are required to submit their thesis for examination. The system facilitates compliance with university regulations, electronic submission, verification of authorship, and

circulation of theses to the relevant Examination Committee. It also captures the final examination report, which contains the outcome and recommendation in relation to the thesis examination. All reports are passed on to the Academic Council Committee on Examinations, who in their capacity as the Examination Board and awarder of research degrees for the University, determine the outcome of the examination and whether a research degree can be awarded.

Viva Voce: is an oral examination, typically used in PhD examinations, conducted in private, where the graduate research student defends their research before a panel of examiners (Examination Committee). The Viva Voce is used as a key component in the examination of research activity.

Extension of Graduate Research Registration: A student can seek permission to continue in their programme beyond their prescribed period of registration where they have not submitted their thesis by their submission deadline and have not had extenuating personal, medical or academic circumstances. Each application to continue in the programme is made for a period no shorter than a trimester and no longer than three trimesters in duration. It must normally be made in advance of a student's thesis submission deadline and approval by the relevant School and Governing Board is required. In such instances, the student will be liable for fees.

Extenuating Circumstances: the occurrence of unforeseen events which have prevented a student from studying/completing assessments/modules resulting in assessment deadlines being missed or performance in relevant assessments being adversely affected. Detailed information can be found in the University's [Extenuating Circumstances policy](#).

Leave of Absence (LOA): An approved, extended period of time, away from the programme of study. This is requested by the student and approved by the relevant Governing Board. Detailed information can be found in the University's [Leave of Absence Policy](#).

Research Repository UCD (RRU): Managed by UCD Library, RRU is a digital collection of open access scholarly publications from UCD. Following award of the degree, the thesis will be hosted on RRU. Candidates wishing to delay release of their thesis onto the repository have an option of placing an embargo on their research.

Thesis Embargo: A thesis embargo will delay the release of a thesis for a specific period of time in the University's repository. Once embargoed, only the title and abstract details of a thesis will appear in the Research Repository UCD. The full text of the thesis will only become available when the embargo period expires. The maximum embargo period currently permitted by the University is five years.

3. Scope

This policy applies to the final examination of graduate research degrees, regardless of the date of commencement of the student in their programme of study. Further details regarding the specific requirements for the Research Master's Degree, Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), Degree of Doctor of Medicine (MD), and Professional Doctorate Degrees are included in the relevant sections.

The processes involved in the preparation, submission and examination of Minor Theses associated with taught master's programmes can be found in the [Policy on Theses in Graduate Taught Programmes](#).

4. Principles

The key principles that underpin the Preparation, Submission and Examination of Research Degree Theses are:

- 4.1. **Integrity:** It is expected that a candidate's thesis, including the main results and conclusions of their research, has, in all aspects, been conducted to the highest standards of rigour and integrity, and that their research has been conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional obligations and standards. Any collaborative work is to be clearly acknowledged.
- 4.2. **Supervision:** The thesis describes research that is carried out by a registered student of UCD under supervision of a UCD faculty member.
- 4.3. **Standard of Quality:** The University expects the highest level of standards from its research students. Doctoral research is expected to make a substantial and original contribution to knowledge and understanding.
- 4.4. **Support:** The University is a supporting research environment that is underpinned by a culture of integrity and based on good governance, best practice, and support for the development of researchers.
- 4.5. **Academic Expertise:** The University will endeavour to ensure that any Examination Committee appointed to examine will have the necessary academic expertise and international standing to evaluate the research presented in the thesis.
- 4.6. **Independent evaluation:** The University will endeavour to ensure that any Examination Committee appointed will provide an objective assessment of the work from a position of independence from the student.
- 4.7. **Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion:** Selection of any appointed Examination Committee will, in so far as is possible, take into account the University's strategic commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. UCD provides a positive working, research and learning environment, which is open to all regardless of age, disability, gender, marriage or civil partnership, race (including ethnic or national origin, nationality or colour), religion or belief, sexual orientation, family status, membership of the travelling community, or socio-economic status.

5. Procedures

Please refer to University Guidelines for Preparation, Submission and Examination of Research Degree Theses¹, which outline step by step procedures for the preparation, submission, examination, and dissemination of Research Degree Theses.

6. Roles and responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities of the key parties involved in the preparation, submission, examination and dissemination of Research Degrees Theses - the candidate, the Principal Supervisor, the Head of School, the Governing Board, the Chair of the Examination Committee, the Intern Examiner(s), the Extern Examiner(s), UCD Registry, the Academic Council Committee on Examinations (ACCE), the Conferring Unit and the Library - are defined as follows:

¹ Link to Guidelines to be inserted when available

6.1. Responsibilities of the Candidate

In order to submit a thesis for examination the candidate shall:

- Be fully cognisant of all relevant University regulations, policies, codes of practice and ethical requirements that relate to their graduate research programme of study and their graduate research degree thesis.
- Be familiar with the requirements related to the University's thesis submission procedures.
- Be a registered student of the University and fees compliant at the time of submission.
- Have satisfied the requirements of the degree programme that they are registered to, prior to submission of their thesis. For PhD candidates, a required minimum of 30 taught credits should have been awarded, or approved through recognition of prior/concurrent learning.
- Have satisfactorily completed research integrity training (*only applicable to graduate research students admitted after 31 August 2019*).
- Have met and worked productively with their Principal Supervisor and members of their Research Studies Panel in the conduct of their research.
- Ensure the Principal Supervisor's approval has been sought to submit the thesis.
- Be aware of the thesis submission deadline and the fee implications of not being able to meet the deadline, and the options available to them where they are not able to meet the submission deadline. Where Extenuating Circumstances occur, the Principal Supervisor and Governing Board should be informed /consulted as soon as possible.
- Where a thesis embargo is required, have been granted approval by the relevant Governing Board in advance of thesis submission.
- Carry out corrections or revisions as directed by the Examination Committee.
- Submit, in a timely manner post examination, a final hard-bound archival copy of the thesis to the Student Desk, UCD Registry for deposition to closed store in the Library.

6.2. Responsibilities of the Principal Supervisor

In order to facilitate a candidate's submission of a graduate research degree thesis for examination, the Principal Supervisor shall:

- Request the Head of School to nominate examiners for approval to the Governing Board, and subsequently to the ACCE, at least three months prior to expected thesis submission by the candidate.
- Make the candidate aware of all relevant programme requirements, University regulations, policies and codes of practice that relate to their graduate research programme of study and their particular graduate research degree thesis.
- Guide the candidate to conduct their research with integrity and in accordance with the regulations, policies and guidelines of the University and applicable legislation.
- Provide information on thesis embargos and associated processes to candidates wishing to delay release of their thesis to the RRU.
- Have primary responsibility for the academic supervision of the research degree student and provide appropriate intellectual and pedagogical advice and support to them, so that they can reach a point where the student can submit their thesis with their approval.
- Liaise, as necessary, with the members of the Research Studies Panel in the course of preparing the candidate for submission of their graduate research degree thesis.

- Be aware of the thesis submission deadline, the fee implications for a candidate of not being able to meet the deadline, and the options available to them where they are not able to meet the submission deadline.
- When satisfied that the candidate's thesis is of a sufficient standard for submission and that all compliance issues have been addressed, enable the candidate to upload their thesis to the eThesis examination system, and, following upload, provide approval for the submission of the thesis for examination.

6.3. Responsibilities of the Head of School

In order to facilitate a candidate's submission of a graduate research degree thesis for examination, the Head of School shall:

- Oversee processes and procedures that will ensure that the Principal Supervisor and candidate are aware of all programme requirements, relevant regulations, policies and codes of practice that relate to the graduate research programme of study.
- Act as the point of escalation, for candidates, where, in their opinion, thesis submission has been unreasonably withheld by their supervisor.
- Where appropriate, make School-wide recommendations regarding the length and format of graduate research degree theses.
- Propose thesis embargo requests to the relevant Governing Board on behalf of candidates.
- Propose the appointment of the relevant Extern Examiner(s) - supported by summary CV information - to the Governing Board upon whose recommendation the appointment may be made by the Academic Council Committee on Examinations.
- Propose the appointment of the relevant Intern Examiner(s) to the Governing Board, upon whose recommendation the appointment may be made by the Academic Council Committee on Examinations.
- Ensure that Extern and Intern Examiner appointments are made at least three months prior to the expected thesis submission by the candidate.
- Act, for all Doctoral degrees, as the Chair of the Examination Committee or designate a nominee to carry out this responsibility.
- In carrying out the aforementioned responsibilities, the Head of School shall consult, where appropriate, with the relevant Head of Subject.
- Escalate any conflict of interest in accordance with the University's Conflict of Interest Policy.

6.4. Responsibilities of the Governing Board

In order to facilitate a candidate's submission of a graduate research degree thesis for examination, the Governing Board shall:

- Ensure that all relevant programme requirements, University regulations, policies and codes of practice that relate to the graduate research programme of study and a particular graduate research degree thesis are conveyed to candidates, supervisors and Heads of Schools.
- Ensure research candidates are compliant with all programme requirements in advance of thesis submission. These may include: completion/award of required taught components, assessment of professional practice (where required), successful completion of Stage Transfer requirements (PhD and Professional doctorate students), completion of research integrity training and any, where appropriate, other requirements as determined by the relevant Governing Board.

- Ensure a process for requesting a thesis embargo is available to candidates who may require it. Make a determination on embargo requests by candidates and ensure the embargo period is accurately recorded on the university's student record system. This must be done to allow thesis submission by the candidate.
- Recommend the appointment of the relevant Extern Examiner(s) (supported by summary CV information), received from Heads of Schools, to the Academic Council Committee on Examinations.
- Recommend the appointment of the relevant Intern Examiner(s), received from Heads of Schools, to the Academic Council Committee on Examinations.
- Ensuring that the Extern and Intern Examiner appointments are made at least three months prior to thesis submission by the candidate.
- Make suitable arrangements to examine theses presented in alternative formats, as required.

6.5. Responsibilities of the Chair of the Examination Committee

Upon submission of the thesis for examination, the Chair of the Examination Committee shall:

- Oversee the examination process of the thesis, from start to finish, and ensure that all steps of the examination are conducted in accordance with the University's regulations and guidelines.
- Ensure each Examiner's pre-viva reports are exchanged amongst all members of the Examination Committee, via the eThesis examination system.
- Convene and conduct, where applicable, the Viva Voce examination in line with all relevant programme requirements, University regulations, policies and codes of practice that relate to the graduate research programme of study, normally within two months of the submission of the thesis.
- Notify the candidate and the Principal Supervisor of the recommendation of the Examination Committee being made to the Academic Council Committee on Examinations.
- Ascertain, where relevant, that all required corrections/revisions have been made to the thesis. This task may be delegated to another member of the Examination Committee, normally the Intern Examiner. Submit confirmation to the Academic Council Committee on Examinations that any such corrections or revisions have been made.
- Oversee the compilation of a high-level joint Final Degree Report (on behalf of all Examiners) containing an assessment of the academic standards of the thesis, the Examination Committee's recommendation relating to degree award, and, if relevant, the candidate's performance in the viva voce examination (this task may be delegated to another member of the Examination Committee).
- Provide an informed perspective on whether the thesis is, in whole or in part, worthy of publication. Ensure the joint Final Degree Report is submitted to the Academic Council Committee on Examinations for review.
- Where the Examiners disagree and cannot unanimously recommend that the degree be awarded, ensure a separate report is submitted from each Examiner to the Academic Council Committee on Examinations for review and adjudication.
- Ensure a copy of the Examiners' Final Degree Report(s) is made available to the candidate following the authorisation or otherwise of the degree award by the Academic Council Committee on Examinations.

6.6. Responsibilities of the Extern Examiner

In support of the examination process, the Extern Examiner² shall:

- Comply with all University examination guidelines and procedures, and all relevant programme requirements, University regulations, policies and codes of practice that relate to the graduate research programme of study.
- Assume a major role in the viva voce examination.
- Where Examiners unanimously recommend award of the degree, liaise with the nominated Intern Examiner in compiling a high-level joint Final Degree Report on behalf of all Examiners containing an assessment of the academic standards of the thesis, the Examination Committee's recommendation relating to degree award, and, if relevant, the candidate's performance in the viva voce examination.
- Where the Examiners disagree and cannot unanimously recommend that the degree be awarded, submit a separate report, via the Chair of the Examination Committee, to the Academic Council Committee on Examinations for review and adjudication.
- Continue in the role of Extern Examiner, in the situation where a candidate is required to revise and submit a thesis for re-examination.

6.7. Responsibilities of the Intern Examiner

In support of the examination process, the Intern Examiner shall:

- Comply with all University examination guidelines and procedures, and all relevant programme requirements, University regulations, policies and codes of practice that relate to the graduate research programme of study.
- On nomination by the Chair of the Examination Committee, ensure that all required corrections or revisions have been made to the thesis, and submit verification of this to the Chair of the Examination Committee, before award of the degree is authorised by the Academic Council Committee on Examinations.
- In the case of the research master's degree, act as the Chair of the Examination Committee.
- Where Examiners unanimously recommend award of the degree, on the nomination of the Chair of the Examination Committee, compile a high-level joint Final Degree Report on behalf of all Examiners containing an assessment of the academic standards of the thesis, the Examination Committee's recommendation relating to degree award, and, if relevant, the candidate's performance in the viva voce examination.
- Where the examiners disagree and cannot unanimously recommend that the degree be awarded, submit a separate report, via the Chair of the Examination Committee, to the Academic Council Committee on Examinations for review and adjudication.

6.8. Responsibilities of UCD Registry

Once a thesis has been submitted for examination, UCD Registry shall:

- Establish whether the candidate is a registered student of the university and is fee compliant the time of submission.

² An Extern Examiner is specifically appointed for a given research degree student as opposed to a Subject Extern Examiner appointed by the University to exercise oversight of a subject or subject area in UCD at undergraduate and graduate level.

- Record, on behalf of the Academic Council Committee on Examinations, the date of the authorisation of the award of the degree and notify the candidate and the Conferring Unit of the award of the degree. Provide the NUI with the candidate's degree information.
- Support the University's eThesis examination system and all stakeholders associated with this process.
- Accept the final hard-bound archival copy of the thesis for deposition in closed store in the Library.
- Upon ACCE approval, transfer the newly awarded thesis to the RRU, via the eThesis examination system.
- Ensure all information contained in the University's eThesis examination system is retained in line with Registry retention schedules.

6.9. Responsibilities of the Academic Council Committee on Examinations (ACCE)

On the delegated authority of Academic Council, and with reference to examination of theses in graduate research programmes, the ACCE has specific functions including:

- Approval of the Research Degree Examination Committee (Chair, Intern and Extern Examiner).
- Act, on behalf of the University, as an Examination Board for all graduate research degrees (Research Master's, MDs, PhDs and Professional Doctorates) to:
 - a) Award, on behalf of the University, all research degrees.
 - b) Adjudicate in cases where there is disagreement among examiners in relation to the award of a research degree.

6.10. Responsibilities of the Conferring Unit

Upon receipt of notification from Assessment, UCD Registry, the Conferring Unit shall:

- Update the record of the candidate, including changing their status to that of graduand.
- Send the graduand information relating to the graduand conferring ceremony, as well as invitations.
- Provide the School and the Governing Board with a list of graduands and information on their conferring ceremony.³

6.11. Responsibilities of the Library

Upon award of the degree, the Library shall:

- Unless previously embargoed, accept the approved thesis for upload to the University's open access repository, Research Repository UCD (RRU). Once uploaded the thesis becomes freely available to download with no access restrictions.
- Accept the final hard-bound archival copy of the thesis from Assessment for deposit in closed store.

³ Further details regarding conferring are available at www.ucd.ie/confer/

7. Thesis Embargo

In line with the [National Principles for Open Access](#), UCD research theses are deposited in the Research Repository UCD (RRU). However, there may be certain circumstances where it is deemed appropriate that an embargo is placed. A thesis embargo will delay the release of a thesis for a specific period of time on to the RRU.

If a candidate wishes to place an embargo on their thesis to prevent it from becoming automatically available, for example due to sensitive or confidential nature of the data contained in the thesis or publication requirements, they must apply, via the university procedure, on submission of their thesis for examination, to the relevant Governing Board requesting approval of the embargo, outlining the rationale for why it is being requested. At present, a maximum embargo length of five years is permitted by the university.

If the embargo is approved by the Governing Board, the embargo expiry date is recorded on the university's Student Information System ensuring that the embargo is automatically implemented once the thesis is transferred from the eThesis examination system to the RRU.

Once embargoed, only the title and abstract details of a thesis will appear in the university's research repository, the full text of the thesis will only become available when the embargo period expires.

8. Intellectual Property

All issues relating to intellectual property will be subject to the University's practices and policies. As per the University's Academic Regulations, all theses remain the property of University College Dublin, giving due recognition to inventors.

9. Related documents

Document Title	Weblink
University Academic Regulations	https://sisweb.ucd.ie/usis!/W HU MENU.P PU BLISH?p_tag=GD-DOCLAND&ID=123
Guidelines for Preparation, Submission and Examination of Research Degree Theses	Link to follow
Extenuating Circumstances Policy	https://sisweb.ucd.ie/usis!/W HU MENU.P PU BLISH?p_tag=GD-DOCLAND&ID=126
Plagiarism Policy	https://sisweb.ucd.ie/usis!/W HU MENU.P PU BLISH?p_tag=GD-DOCLAND&ID=113
Code of Practice for Supervisors and Research Degree Students	https://sisweb.ucd.ie/usis!/W HU MENU.P PU BUSH?p_tag=GD DOCLAND&ID=10
Policy for Conflict Resolution for Supervisor(s) and Graduate Research Students	https://sisweb.ucd.ie/usis!/W HU MENU.P PU BUSH?p_tag=GD DOCLAND&ID=11
eThesis Guidelines	http://www.ucd.ie/students/assessment/

10. Version history

Version	Date	Summary of Changes	Changed by
1.0 - 1.7	July 2007 - June 2009	Draft version revised following Policy Working Group input	Martina Boyle
1.8 - 1.23	Sept 2009 - Mar 2010	Changes made following stakeholder feedback	Michael Kennedy
1.24	26 Mar 2010	Changes made following consultation with UGPB	Michael Kennedy
1.25 - 1.28	Mar - Apr 2010	Changes made following consultation with ACCE	Michael Kennedy/ Ciarán Ó hUltacháin
1.29	23 April 2010	Additional minor changes following discussion at AC meeting of 23 April 2010. Final APPROVED version	Michael Kennedy
1.30 - 1.38	Dec 2010 - Mar 2015	Minor changes made to align policy with other university policies	Michael Kennedy/ Ciarán Ó hUltacháin/Martina Boyle
1.39	Mar 2015	Minor changes made to align policy with other university policies	Martina Boyle
1.40	30 Apr 2020	Policy aligned with the university's new Academic Regulations, incorporation of eThesis Exam system information	Emer Cunningham/Bianca Shaw