Union Theological College

# Code of Practice for Research Degree Programme (PhD)

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## Section 1: Introduction

1.1 Union Theological College (UTC) is a small specialist College based in Belfast, Northern Ireland. The College has a longstanding tradition in providing supervision for research degrees. The College grants its own Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) award through the Royal Charter (1881) and Supplemental Charter (2021) of the Presbyterian Theological Faculty, Ireland (PTFI).

1.2 Postgraduate research opportunities are offered across all fields of Theology, allowing students to be part of a research environment in an institution that seeks to promote the highest standards.

1.3 This Code of Practice should be read in conjunction with the PhD Regulations at Appendix 12. It has been developed to align with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education: Research Degrees (2024) and the QAA Doctoral Degree Characteristic Statement (2020). It is written for students, staff, examiners, and other stakeholders. It forms an integral part of the College's quality assurance mechanisms and is designed to assure the quality and maintain the academic standards of the PhD degree pathway and to ensure consistency to research degree provision.

1.4. The UTC PhD is available as a full-time or part-time pathway. In the UK Higher Education sector a full-time PhD pathway means at least 35 hours of work per week with 8 weeks annual leave over a three-year period. Applicants should regard full-time doctoral research as similar to a full-time

occupation. A part-time PhD pathway means 17 hours per week (excluding holidays) over a six-year period.

## Section 2: The Research Environment

2.0 UTC is developing a research environment which embeds a culture of research among students and staff at the highest level.

2.1 In accepting students onto its research degree programmes, UTC is committed to:

i. Have an appropriate pool of research supervisors who are able to fulfil the necessary roles
ii. Provide appropriate facilities and support
iii. Working in partnerships with others in order to achieve these ends.

2.2 UTC facilitates effective research by providing access and opportunities to interact with academic staff and other research students, for example, through hybrid postgraduate research seminars and peer support networks. An annual PhD symposium provides an opportunity for students to present their research findings to peers and academics who can provide valuable feedback on the direction of their research.

2.3 The Faculty oversees research within the College, delegating specific matters to the Research Committee (RC). The RC is chaired by the Director of Postgraduate Research and includes a number of research-active members of Faculty (Appendix 1).

2.4 Research students are provided with clear and concise advice (and training where relevant) in relation to good academic practice including matters of academic integrity. The consequences of plagiarism and any other form of research misconduct are outlined clearly in the College's Academic Integrity Policy (UTC makes use of Turnitin Integrity software, both to detect plagiarism and to help students avoid unintentional plagiarism).

2.5 UTC provides residential research students with appropriate facilities, and access to computing and library facilities. UTC provides distance learning students with online access to e-resources through the College Library. Distance learning students are encouraged to come to Belfast to work in the College Library (in line with any UKVI visa requirements.) In the declaration contained in the application form a distance-study applicant confirms the availability of suitable research resources in their location.

### Research Ethics

2.6 Research students who will be undertaking research with human participants will be required to apply for ethical approval through their supervisor to the Research Committee. The College's Policy

on the Ethical Approval of Research outlines issues to take into account when undertaking research with human participants (See Appendix 2).

## Section 3: Selection, Admission, and Induction of Students

### Admissions Procedures

3.1 Information on admissions procedures can be found on the College website. Prospective students are requested to contact the Director of Postgraduate Research or a member of Faculty whose research area aligns to their proposal in order to ensure that they are directed towards an appropriate potential supervisor.

Several resources are available on the College website to inform potential applicants about the PhD programme:

- About Our PhD Programme
- Guide to Writing Your Doctoral Research Proposal

The following documents should to be sent to admissions@union.ac.uk:

- Proposal (advised 1,500–2,000 words, excluding bibliography)
- A curriculum vitae (CV)
- Sample of academic work (ideally the master's dissertation)
- Application f orm (including declaration)
- Two signed letters of reference, at least one an academic reference
- Academic Transcript(s) and a copy (or copies of degree certificates)
- English language certification, if appropriate
- Certified Photographic ID, typically in the form of a passport

The College will confirm receipt of the application portfolio.

Admission to the programme usually occurs at the beginning of the autumn semester (typically mid-September) or the beginning of the spring semester (typically mid-January).

### Entry Requirements and the Decision-Making Process

3.2 The College applies standard criteria and procedures as part of a transparent admission process for all students and this is underpinned by the Admissions Policy for PTFI Programmes.

Criteria for Admissions
Typically, a UK level 7 advanced master's degree or equivalent qualification, in theology or a related discipline. The Research Committee can approve the admission of a student with non-standard

qualifications when there is demonstrable evidence that the applicant is capable of functioning at the required level for graduate research, for example, when the student has a previous doctoral award in a related field of research.

We typically require all applicants whose first language is not English to have one of the following qualifications as evidence of their English language ability:

- An undergraduate or master's degree that was taught and assessed in English in a majority English-speaking country as defined by UK Visas and Immigration.
- International English Language Testing System (IELTS) Academic module (not General Training): overall score of 7.0 with at least 6.5 in each category.
- Pearson Test of English, Academic: PTE(A) total 67 (at least 61 in each of the 'communicative skills' sections).
- Cambridge Proficiency (CPE) or Cambridge Advanced (CAE): total 186 (at least 176 in each module).

Typically, for this purpose, degrees taught and assessed in English must have been completed no more than three years old at the beginning of the doctoral programme. Language tests must be no more than two years old at the beginning of the degree programme.

Decisions on the admission of PGR students are made by Research Committee.

Where applicants are required to complete an assessment or attend an interview, the College will ensure that any reasonable adjustments which the applicant may require as a result of disability or long-term condition are arranged in advance.

## Communication of decision regarding the application

3.3 Successful applicants receive an outcome letter that provides a range of information, including information relating to funding, support services, and immigration procedures, as appropriate. Students are advised in the correspondence that by accepting an offer of admission they are agreeing to meet the responsibilities for their academic studies and candidacy for a research degree as outlined below. The offer letter states that non-residential research students in accepting their offer are also confirming they have local access to appropriate resources.

For unsuccessful applicants, an outcome letter will be provided in a timely manner and will include details on how the decision may be appealed.

## Responsibilities of Students towards the College and their Supervisors

3.4 At their initial supervisory meeting, students are advised of their responsibilities and the responsibilities of their supervisor(s) and work with their primary supervisor to devise a research plan.

Research students' responsibilities include:

I. Personal and professional development, including, where possible, recognising when they need help and seeking it in a timely manner.
II. Maintaining regular contact with their supervisor(s) through the primary supervisor.
III. Preparing adequately for the required formal meetings with their supervisor, completing the record (see appendix 9) and implementing any action points in a timely manner.
IV. Setting and keeping to timetables and deadlines, including planning and submitting work as and when required, and maintaining satisfactory progress with the programme.
V. Raising awareness of any specific needs or circumstances likely to affect their work.
VI. Attending any development opportunities (research-related or other) that have been identified when agreeing development needs with their supervisor(s).
VII. International Students are reminded that UTC has a responsibility to inform the UKVI should attendance fall below their prescribed threshold of 85%.

The student is responsible for the submitted work, and the eventual success or failure of the programme. Students are made aware that, in signing the Notice of Intention to Submit a Thesis form (Appendix 8), they must obtain the primary supervisor's consent for submission and examination.

# Section 4: Supervision

## Supervisory Arrangements

4.0 The Research Committee will recommend suitable supervisory arrangements for each student. For each student who accepts a place and is admitted to the programme, Faculty will formally appoint the supervisor or supervisors as soon as possible thereafter.

4.1 Each student will have a primary supervisor, who will be the main point of contact for the student. Where the primary supervisor is a member of UTC Faculty, they will also fulfil the role and responsibilities of faculty supervisor, and a separate faculty supervisor is not required. Where the primary supervisor is not a member of UTC Faculty, a separate faculty supervisor will be appointed. A consultant supervisor may also be appointed where appropriate. A student may therefore have a single supervisor where the primary supervisor is a member of UTC Faculty. No student may have more than three supervisors at any one time.

4.2 The College will consider whether appropriate supervision can be provided and maintained throughout the research period when admitting a student to a programme. The Faculty is responsible for ensuring the appointment of appropriate supervision in the event of a supervisor being unavailable for a significant period of the student's research, or should a change in supervisor be required under different circumstances such as at the student's request.

4.3 Roles and responsibilities are as follows:

Research supervisors will:

- Typically, be drawn from members of Faculty, UTC Research Associates, or senior scholars considered appropriate by the Research Committee; and

- Be experienced in and actively engaged in research (while recognizing the unique manner in which theory and practice overlap in theological research); and
- Hold a research degree at the same level as, or higher than, the degree being supervised.

The supervisory arrangements will provide for:

- A primary supervisor who is currently engaged in relevant or related research, so as to ensure that the direction and monitoring of the student's progress is informed by subject knowledge and research developments.
- A faculty supervisor who is a member of UTC Faculty, in order to facilitate compliance with UTC policies and procedures. Where the primary supervisor is a member of UTC Faculty, they will also fulfil this role.
- Where appropriate, a consultant supervisor appointed from UTC Research Associates to provide further ad hoc supervision of a specialised nature.

The primary and faculty supervisor roles may be held by the same person in accordance with section 4.1. A separate faculty supervisor is required where the primary supervisor is not a member of UTC Faculty.

Given the specialist nature of research, it may be appropriate to appoint Research Supervisors who are not full-time members of the Faculty. Such supervisors are designated Research Associates of Union Theological College. All Research Associates are expected to comply with UTC policies and procedures and are subject to annual reappointment.

## Responsibilities of the Supervisor

4.4 The student is responsible for the eventual success or failure of the programme. The supervisor(s) provides the student with advice, help and guidance over the course of the programme, enabling access to relevant training and development opportunities, to support the completion of the programme.

4.5 At an initial supervisory meeting the supervisor(s) and student agree the roles and responsibilities of the student and each appointed supervisor; and the frequency, duration and format of formal meetings. In addition to the mandatory, recorded, eight formal meetings per year between the supervisor(s) and full-time student (pro rata for part-time students), there are normally additional, informal meetings as required, depending on the needs of the student and the supervisory team. All meetings are recorded on a template (Appendix 4). Students and supervisors are jointly responsible for ensuring that regular and frequent contact is maintained.

## 4.6 Supervisory Responsibilities are as Follows:

I. The primary supervisor has overall responsibility for supervision. Any separately appointed faculty or consultant supervisor will provide support in accordance with their agreed role.

II. The primary supervisor is responsible for induction and must ensure the student is made aware of relevant policies and procedures, including the use of originality checking software, and specific policies, including gaining ethical approval where appropriate.
III. The primary supervisor will ensure that the student understands the nature and requirements of postgraduate research, including progress requirements and deadlines, and is aware of the standards expected of them as a research student.
IV. The primary supervisor will agree with the student what training and development requirements need to be fulfilled as part of the requirements for the completion of the programme.
V. The primary supervisor will agree an initial research plan with the student, which may be subject to change during the course of the programme.
VI. The primary supervisor will provide timely and constructive feedback on the student's work and overall progress within the programme, raising any concerns about progress at an early stage with the student.
VII. The supervisor(s) will ensure that appropriate records are maintained in relation to supervisory meetings, progress monitoring, Annual Progress Review, and Differentiation (confirmation of status).
VIII. The primary supervisor will provide appropriate pastoral support as required, by providing advice and/or referring the student to other sources of support, including relevant support services. The primary supervisor normally undertakes the role of personal tutor.
IX. The supervisor(s) will help the student interact with others working in the field of research, for example, encouraging the student to attend relevant seminars and conferences; supporting them in seeking funding for such events as required; and where appropriate supporting the submission of conference papers and articles to refereed journals.

## Supervisor Workload

4.7 The Research Committee should ensure that the existing teaching, research and administration commitments of potential supervisors from the College are fully taken into consideration before they are appointed, allowing supervisors to have sufficient time to monitor and support the progress of the student's research, and to respond to the student in a timely manner.

## Supervisor Support and Training

4.8 The Research Committee will ensure that supervisors have the appropriate training and skills to perform the task of supervision satisfactorily and will review annually with supervisors their needs for additional training to offer the best supervision possible to research students. Feedback from students will be considered when assessing the training needs of supervisors. The College will put in place any training that is deemed appropriate to enhance the skills of supervisors. Research Associates must report on the training they have undertaken as part of the annual reappointment process.

# Section 5: Progress and Review Arrangements

## Monitoring and Supporting Student Progress

**5.1 To support progress within the programme, the College is committed to the following:**

I. **Effective supervision and the implementation of the research plan.**
II. **Regular progress monitoring, including the requirement for a minimum of eight formal, recorded meetings per year between the supervisor(s) and student to monitor progress against the research plan; and mechanisms to identify and deal with progress issues at an early stage.**
III. **Annual Progress Review.**
IV. **Differentiation (confirmation of status).**

## Differentiation (Confirmation of Status)

**5.2 Students are admitted as Probationary Research Students and are offered the opportunity to confirm doctoral status (differentiate) at the end of their first year of study. With the permission of their primary supervisor, they may request an earlier confirmation meeting. The deadline for differentiation is typically within the first 18 months of study for full-time students (three years for part-time students). Any delay beyond the allowed period requires justification and formal approval by the Research Committee. A failure to differentiate within the allowed period without an approved extension may result in withdrawal from the programme.**

**Confirmation of status normally requires the submission of the following: an outline of the provisional research project (maximum 1,000 words), a forward plan with a schedule and expected dates of completion, a supporting bibliography, and a sample of work such as part of a draft chapter (4,000–6,000 words). These submissions will be assessed in an interview with two examiners and a recommendation made to the Research Committee (Appendix 5).**

**The criteria for the assessment are:**

- **Is the work presented by the student such as might reasonably be expected as a result of their having studied for the equivalent of around 12 months full-time for a PhD?**
- **Has the student shown that they are able to exercise independent critical judgement?**
- **Has the student demonstrated that they understand how their research topic is related to the wider body of scholarly literature?**
- **Has the student demonstrated the potential to produce an original contribution to knowledge?**
- **Is the student's work, and their understanding of it, of a standard that indicates that it will lead to the successful submission of a PhD thesis within 3-4 years full-time registration (or part-time equivalent)?**

**Students will be informed from the beginning of their programme pathway that confirmation of status is not an automatic process and the Research Committee will require clear evidence of satisfactory attainment.**

Where previous experience in research is deemed satisfactory by the Faculty, the prescribed period of study may be reduced to two academic years for applicants for full-time PhD study and four academic years for applicants to part-time PhD study.

## Annual Progress Review

5.3 All PGR students are subject to Annual Progress Review (APR). For students who commenced study in September, APR occurs in or around June. For those who commenced study in January, APR occurs in or around November. This applies to both full-time and part-time students. The following is required:

I. The student's written self-evaluative summary of work completed during the period of the review together with a clear project plan for the remainder of the research period. These details are provided in the Postgraduate Research Student Annual Progress Review form (see Appendix 6). The student submits the completed form to the primary supervisor.
II. If the project is being conducted within the framework of a collaborative arrangement the relevant programme liaison will confirm that the Code of Practice has been followed and relevant supervision records are retained.
III. The completed form is submitted to the Director of Postgraduate Research who will bring a recommendation to the Research Committee or seek guidance from it concerning remedial actions. This may include establishing a Progress Review Panel to assess the level of student work.

5.4 The College may appoint a Progress Review Panel for a student who has not produced sufficient evidence of progress. This should normally comprise two Research Associates unconnected to the research project. One of the panel members should be a full-time member of Faculty within the College.

One supervisor, normally the primary supervisor, may be present to provide input, but may not take part in making the final recommendation concerning the student's progress. If a supervisor attends a panel meeting, they should be asked to leave the meeting for a few minutes so the student can openly discuss the supervisory process.

For external students, and those who are studying away from the College, it is acceptable to host the meeting between the progress review panel and student via MS Teams or alternative videoconferencing or teleconferencing approaches.

5.4.1 Where a student fails to attend the Panel meeting without good cause, the Panel may consider the case and forward a recommendation to the Research Committee in the absence of the student and without further notice. It is the responsibility of the student to establish good cause to the satisfaction of the Panel.

5.5 Registration for a new year of study shall be dependent on the completion of a satisfactory annual progress report (including any remedial actions) and confirmation that no student fees are outstanding. Students who may need to register for a further year of study in order to have a final version of the thesis approved prior to graduation must also complete the APR process.

5.6 Both the student and their supervisor(s) will receive written feedback from the Director of Postgraduate Research. A student who is dissatisfied with the outcome of the progress review may appeal using the Academic Appeals (Research Degrees) Procedure.

## Section 6: Development of Research and Other Skills

6.1 Full-time research students are expected to undertake training and development activity throughout the course of their programme.

6.2 Through their supervisor, PhD students may request purchase by the Gamble Library of e-books in support of their research, use of inter-library loans facilities and, in certain circumstances, the posting of hard-copy books (see the Postal Loan Policy).

6.3 Whilst opportunities for skills development are integrated in the programme, the College may provide additional subject-specific training. Students will also be made aware of various training opportunities and be encouraged to attend conferences, as appropriate.

## Section 7: Assessment

### Criteria for the Award of a PhD

This section should be read in conjunction with the PhD regulations (Appendix 15)

7.1 Students are required to submit a thesis, the length of which should not normally be fewer than 80,000 or greater than 100,000 words. Footnotes are included in this total but the bibliography and any appendices deemed essential support for the thesis are not. Prior approval must be obtained from the Research Committee for the inclusion of any appendices. The first page of the thesis must include the author's full names; degrees held by the author; title of thesis; degree for which it is offered; and date of submission (month/year). The minimum margins should be a left margin of 4 cm (to allow for binding) and right, top and bottom margins of 2.5 cm. The pages and illustrations must be numbered consecutively. The text may be presented in either one-and-a-half or double-line spacing.

For more details see Dissertation Submission Guidance (see Appendix 7)

A detailed timetable for final preparation and submission of the thesis should be prepared in consultation with the supervisor(s), at least six months before the end of the normal period of study. Students must give at least three months' notice to the RC of intention to submit their thesis.

The assessment includes a thorough review of the submitted thesis followed by a *viva voce* oral examination, normally conducted by two examiners. Supervisors have no role in the examination of doctoral awards that they have supervised, although the primary supervisor may attend the examination. Typically, a member of Faculty will chair the process and two examiners external to the college will conduct the examination. In every case the examiners will be subject matter experts who are external to the college.

7.2 Doctoral degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

i. The creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline, and merit publication.
ii. A systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline or area of professional practice.
iii. The general ability to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge, applications or understanding at the forefront of the discipline, and to adjust the project design in the light of unforeseen problems.
iv. A detailed understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry.

## Roles and Responsibilities in the Examination Process

7.3 Examiners have an obligation of confidentiality regarding the thesis and the examination. The Faculty appoints the examiners, and the convener. The College sends the formal appointment letter to the examiners, along with appropriate regulations and guidance. The examiners are specialists in the subject area of the thesis.

7.4 A chair is appointed by the Faculty as a convener of the oral examination panel. The convener is in attendance to monitor the conduct of the examination and provide a report.

The following guidelines outline the role of the convener:

i. The Convener is responsible for ensuring that the oral is conducted in a fair manner, and must be present for the duration of the examination. However, the Convener is not one of the examiners and will not participate in the examination of the student, nor is there a requirement to read the thesis.
ii. The Convener introduces those present at the oral examination, and ensures that all parties understand the procedures to be followed, and the expectations of each member. The Convener offers assistance and facilitation where necessary.
iii. The Convener is responsible for ensuring that the oral is of a reasonable duration. Where the oral is longer than two hours, it is recommended that the student be offered a short intermission. Where difficulties arise, the Convener will decide whether an adjournment is required.
iv. The Convener intervenes if there is a danger of unfairness, bias or unprofessional behaviour.
v. Towards the end of the oral examination, the Convener asks the supervisor to withdraw so that the student has an opportunity to say anything they would prefer to say without the presence of the supervisor.
vi. At the end of the oral examination, the Convener asks the student to withdraw while the examiners deliberate.
vii. If the examiners wish to advise the student of their recommendations, the Convener ensures that the student knows that this recommendation is provisional only.
viii. The Convener is required to submit a report on covering the procedural conduct of the examination.

ix. Only one supervisor may attend the oral, with the agreement of the student, and may speak only with the examiners' agreement. The supervisor's main role is to comment on any practical or administrative difficulties in the pursuit of the research raised by the student.

7.5. The College Office will make the arrangements for the oral examination, in consultation with the student and the examiners.

## Appointment of Examiners

7.6 One of the important roles of the examiners is to ensure that the thesis meets the requirements of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications. Examiners are appointed for the entire examination process, which includes any re-examination.

The supervisor should consult the DRP about any potential examiners. Formal nominations will be submitted by the Research Committee to Faculty. All examiners and conveners will be appointed by the Faculty.

The appropriate form (Appendix 9) for appointing an external examiner should be completed, together with a curriculum vitae of the proposed external examiner, a minimum of 12 weeks before the expected submission date. This period is necessary to allow for all the necessary checks, including the suitability of examiners and for appointment packs to be sent out.

There must be an appropriate balance of experience across the examining team and at least one of the examiners should be external to the College. The CV any external examiner must demonstrate previous experience of research degree supervision and/or examination. Should a proposed external examiner lack significant experience, a strong case needs to be made for their appointment and evidence provided of how the Panel as a whole will be able to discharge its duties.

Conveners must normally be permanent members of Faculty of the College with experience of supervision and examining of research degrees and knowledge of the Regulations for Research Degree Programmes and the Code of Practice for Research Degrees (Appendix 15). The Chair must not have been involved in the supervision of the candidate. It is not necessary for the Chair to be a subject expert.

## The Preparatory Period Prior to the Viva

7.7 The College Office provides the thesis to the examiners, along with the examination report templates in electronic format.

The research and the written submission must be the student's own work. An examiner who, in reading a thesis, discovers evidence of plagiarism, fabrication of results or other research misconduct should report the matter immediately to the Director of Postgraduate Research, who will instigate an investigation under the College academic offences procedure and inform the examiners of its outcome in due course. The examination will not continue until this process is

complete, and may not continue at all if the student is found to have committed a serious academic offence.

Each examiner is required to complete an Independent Report (Appendix 12) on the thesis before the oral examination, without consulting the other examiner(s). Each examiner indicates in this preliminary report whether the thesis provisionally satisfies the requirements for the research degree, and makes an appropriate provisional recommendation subject to the outcome of the oral examination.

The examiners typically contact each other a few days before the oral to discuss how the examination is to be handled. This enables them to identify the major issues which will be raised in the examination.

Examiners meet before the oral examination starts in order to exchange, and discuss, the Independent Reports.

The student and the examiners may not communicate with each other about the thesis before the examination.

A period of six to eight weeks is normally allowed for reading and examining a thesis, including the oral examination of the student.

For further guidance for students prior to the examination consult Preparing for the Viva (see Appendix 11).

## The Oral Examination

7.8 An oral examination is compulsory for all doctoral students, and is normally held in the College but may also occur via MS Teams. It may serve a number of different functions including the following:

i. It provides the student with the opportunity to defend the thesis through high-level debate with experts in the subject.
ii. It gives the examiners an opportunity to explore any doubts they may have about the material presented in the thesis.
iii. It can be used to determine that the student is the author of the written materials submitted.
iv. It enables the examiners to check that the student has a thorough understanding of the theoretical framework, issues, methods and statistical analysis involved.

## Confirming and Communicating the Result

7.9 An agreed Joint Report, signed by all the examiners, is completed after the oral examination, and submitted to the College Office normally within five working days of the oral examination (Appendix 13). The Joint Report reflects the examiners' assessment of both the written submission and the student's performance at the oral examination, and includes a recommendation as to the outcome of the examination. It need not repeat comments already made in the Independent Reports. The Joint and Independent Reports taken together should be of sufficient length and provide sufficient evidence to justify the examiners' recommendation.

The convener submits a report covering the procedural conduct of the examination, to the Director of Postgraduate Research, normally within five working days of the oral examination (Appendix 14).

After considering the Independent Reports, the Report of the Convener, and the Joint Report, the Director of Postgraduate Research presents the results to the Research Committee for consideration. The Research Committee then makes a recommendation to the Exam Board.

The College Office notifies the student of the outcome of the examination, and sends the student a copy of the examiners' reports, normally within two weeks of the oral examination. The possible outcomes are listed in the programme regulations.

Following approval of the amendments (for minor corrections or minor revisions), received within the deadline set by the examiners, the chair of the examination board completes the Report indicating that all amendments have been completed within deadline. The Director of Postgraduate Research presents the results to the Research Committee for consideration. The Research Committee then makes a recommendation to the Exam Board. The Registrar is responsible for communicating the decision of the Exam Board to the candidate and their supervisors.

Students who fail to submit a corrected or revised thesis by the date set by the examiners will normally be regarded as having failed the examination. If the student has advised of extenuating circumstances in advance of the deadline, an extension may be granted by the Director of Postgraduate Research, following approval of the Research Committee.

Graduation is dependent upon all fees being paid and a physical copy of the dissertation being deposited in the Library.

## Section 8: Research Student Complaints and Appeals

### Complaints and Appeals Procedures

8.1 It is in the interests of research students and the College to resolve problems at an early stage. Clear explanations should be provided to students regarding academic and progress outcomes. Appeals regarding academic and progress matters will be considered under the Academic Appeals (Research Degrees) Procedure. Complaints will be considered under the Student Complaints Procedure.

## Section 9: Mechanisms for Quality Assurance and Evaluation

### Collecting and Responding to Evaluations of Research Degree Programme.

9.1 The College ensures there are mechanisms in place for a variety of stakeholders to be able to provide feedback on the delivery, assessment and outcome of programme.

Student feedback is collated in a number of ways from formal questionnaires to informal feedback sessions with supervisors. This feedback is reviewed, acted upon, and reported back to

**stakeholders both informally at College support area level, and more formally through College governance structures.**

**Feedback from supervisors, review panels and examiners will be collated and acted upon, by the Research Committee. Feedback is gathered from external parties in a number of ways, including through the examination process, from external examiners.**

**All of this feedback, and the resultant actions, will be reviewed as part of the College's Annual Review of Research Degree Programmes process, a key quality assurance mechanism to review academic standards and quality.**

# Appendices

**Appendix 1: Research Committee Terms of Reference and Membership**

## Union Theological College

## Research Committee Terms of Reference and Membership

| **Terms of Reference:** | |
|---|---|
| **The Faculty has oversight of research degree programmes within the College and has delegated the following matters to the Research Committee:**<br>**(i) Functions as the Admission Panel**<br>**(ii) Monitoring student progress through the Annual Progress Review**<br>**(iii) Approving Progress recommendations**<br>**(iv) Identifying and monitoring research student development opportunities**<br>**(v) Ensuring that examination procedures align with the programme regulations and Code of Practice**<br>**(vi) Making recommendations to Faculty regarding the composition of the oral examination panel**<br>**(vii) Reviewing the programme regulations and Code of Practice on an annual basis**<br>**(viii) Receiving the report of the Annual Programme Review for Research Degree Programmes**<br>**(ix) Monitors the delivery of research pathways through collaborative Research Degree Programmes**<br>**(x) Approving student temporary withdrawals and changes of status**<br>**(xi) Consideration of applications for ethical approval** | |
| **Membership:** | |
| **<u>Composition</u>** | |
| **Chair:** | **Director of Postgraduate Research** |
| | **Two members of UTC faculty. One from the Department of Biblical Studies and one from the Department of Theology.**<br>**An external partner of UTC with expertise in PGR.** |
| **In attendance** | **A member of College Administration, usually the College Registrar** |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Quorum** | **Two** |
| **Serviced by:** | **Union College** |
| **Reports to:** | **Faculty** |
| **Receives reports from:** | **n/a** |

Appendix 2: Policy on the Ethical Approval of Research

# Union Theological College

## Policy on the Ethical Approval of Research

1. The College is committed to ensuring that all research undertaken by its staff and students is conducted to the highest standard of integrity. The College requires that all research involving human participants must receive ethics approval from the College Research Committee prior to commencing and comply with the legal requirements of the UK. The College Research Committee may seek expert advice on the ethical implications of the proposed research.
2. The College expects that all human participant research is undertaken with respect for all persons or groups involved, either directly or indirectly. Further, these persons and/or groups should not suffer either undue advantage or disadvantage in respect of age, sex, race, ethnicity, religion, political beliefs, lifestyle or any other significant social or cultural differences.
3. Harm or burden to those involved in or affected by research must be minimized. Participants must be warned in advance about any potential risks of harm.
4. The most important principle, in human participant research, is that of free and informed consent. Whilst the form of consent may vary according to the circumstances, informed consent generally requires the participant to have:

   4.1 Capacity to consent;

   4.2 Have been provided with all information regarding the research that may affect their willingness to participate. This must be provided (normally as a participant information sheet) in a language/format that is clear and easy to understand;

   4.3 Have been made aware that participation is voluntary and that they may withdraw at any time. This includes the right, in the light of experience of the investigation or as a result of debriefing, to withdraw retrospectively any consent previously given and to require that their own data, including recordings or material, be destroyed. However, the right to withdraw consent retrospectively has limitations – for example, it cannot be fully given after a report has been published. Also, in some circumstances the right of the participant to withdraw consent may be outweighed by the public or scientific interest of the relevant information. It should be made clear to participants at what point, if any, they are no longer able retrospectively to withdraw their participation;

   4.4 Have understood that not participating or withdrawing will have no effect on their subsequent treatment or standing;

   4.5 Have been asked to participate without undue pressure or inducement. It is important to recognise the extent to which research participants may be inconvenienced, and that they should be appropriately rewarded for this, e.g., payment of travel expenses. However, payment of participants should not be used to induce them to risk harm beyond that which they risk without payment in their normal lifestyle;

4.6 Have understood they may ask questions and receive answers regarding their participation.

4.7 There may be cases where deception or withholding of certain information is necessary, until after data has been collected. An example might be where a hypothesis is being tested, that participants will react in a particular way to being given certain information. If the participants were informed of the hypothesis before the experiment this may influence their responses and hence the validity of the study.

4.8 Alternatives to the use of deception should be considered and demonstrated to be ineffective. The use of deception to induce severe physical pain or emotional distress is not justified. Researchers should inform participants regarding their deception as soon as possible after their participation in the study and usually not later than at the conclusion of the data collection. Participants should, in most circumstances, be given the opportunity to withdraw their data.

4.9 Researchers should be cognizant of the difference between consent as part of an ethical process when conducting a study and consent to hold and process data with respect to the General Data Protection Legislation. Where possible, participants should be advised that, as a publicly-funded organization, it is most likely that the research is being conducted in the public interest and it is on this basis that personal data is collected and processed.

4.10 Researchers must consider and obtain enduring consent for the sharing, archiving and re-use of data once it has been fully anonymized.

5. Research involving children, vulnerable adults or dependent persons

5.1 In circumstances where the participant lacks the capacity to provide consent, the research team should consider the justification and merits of involving the particular research group.

5.2 Where participants are children, vulnerable adults or dependent persons, the researchers should:

i. Explain the research and the participants' role and requirements
ii. Seek the participants' agreement
iii. Ensure the person's best interests are served;
iv. Obtain assent from the participants' legal guardian.

5.3 Any research involving children should comply with Articles 3 and 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 3 requires that in all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child must be the primary consideration. Article 12 requires that children who are capable of forming their own views should be granted the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, commensurate with their age and maturity.

5.4 Any member of staff or student intending to undertake research with children must comply with relevant legislation. The Head of Department remains the person responsible for checking and complying with such legal requirements. However, the researcher (or supervisor in the case of students) must ensure that they have considered the legislation.

5.5 A vulnerable adult may be someone who is incapacitated, or a dependent person. Particular care should be exercised when conducting research involving vulnerable groups or dependent persons, to ensure that they have not been subjected to undue influence to participate. Their decision to participate may be influenced by their reliance on those who may be requesting or

offering their participation in research. Such persons include: students; those deprived of their liberty; recipients of health care dependent on their health care provider for continued care; those in military service; health care workers or other employees (particularly those in junior positions).

5.6 Whilst all human beings enrolled in research may be said to be vulnerable to harm, as research, by definition, involves a level of uncertainty, some individuals may be more vulnerable than others to the risk of being treated unethically in research. Potential research participants can be classified as vulnerable due to cognitive, situational, institutional, deferential, medical, economic, and social factors.

## 6.0 Privacy

6.1 The privacy of individuals who have agreed to participate in research must be respected. Even though they may have agreed to participate, they should not be expected to divulge information on every aspect of their lives, particularly on areas considered sensitive and personal to them.

6.2 It should be made clear to participants that they are free to decide what information they wish to share with the researcher and that they are under no pressure or obligation to discuss matters that they do not wish to.

6.3 In cases where a researcher has already developed a relationship with an individual or group of people before inviting them to participate in a research study, they have a special responsibility to protect the privacy of those concerned. More specifically, they should obtain their explicit consent if they wish to use information that the individuals may have shared with them prior to their participation in the study.

6.4 Observational studies are sometimes conducted in naturalistic settings in which the 'participants' are unaware that an investigation is taking place. Unobtrusive observation raises significant ethical questions regarding informed consent and invasion of privacy. Before conducting unobtrusive observational studies, it is essential to undertake an assessment of the extent to which human dignity may be jeopardized, and that threat must be weighed against the value of the study. Such research is only acceptable in situations where those being observed would expect to be observed by strangers. Particular account must also be taken of local cultural values and of the possibility of intruding upon the privacy of individuals who, even while in a normally public space, may believe they are unobserved.

## 7.0 Confidentiality, Anonymity and Data processing/storage

7.1 Data relating to research should be stored for a minimum period of five years following the completion of the study. However, legislation and funders' terms and conditions take precedence. Researchers must ensure all research data is processed and stored in a secure manner and in accordance with obligations outlined in Data Protection legislation.

7.2 Confidentiality of personal data relating to research participants is essential and it is of paramount concern that this is protected. All personal information must therefore be encoded or made anonymous, as far as possible, and as early as possible after collection; ciphers should be held separately.

**7.3 Even with anonymised data, care must be taken to ensure that any variables or combination of variables, particularly group or location identifiers (such as postcodes), cannot lead to the identification of individuals (or small groups of individuals).**

**7.4 When seeking consent from potential participants, researchers should inform them of measures taken to ensure their confidentiality and to protect their anonymity. They should also make clear any potential limits associated with these measures. In particular:**

i. **In research involving children, should the researcher have any concerns regarding the safety or well-being of a child participant, they have a duty under the Children Order (NI) 1995 to report their concerns to a relevant authority;**
ii. **Where there is sufficient evidence for the researcher to have serious concerns about the safety of a participant (adult or child) or about others who may be at significant risk because of the behaviour of that participant, then they have a moral obligation to inform an appropriate third party;**
iii. **Information provided in confidence to a researcher does not enjoy legal privilege, and may be liable to legal subpoena in court, under section 5 of the Criminal Law Act (NI) 1967. The possibility of such disclosure should be explained to the participants.**

# Union Theological College

## Checklist for Research Ethics Review Involving Human Participants

**The College is committed to ensuring that all research undertaken by its staff and students is conducted to the highest standards of integrity. Central to this is the consideration of ethical issues arising from research involving human participants and data. The College's policy is that all such research should undergo appropriate ethical scrutiny, to ensure that the rights, dignity, safety and well-being of all those involved are protected.**

**This research ethics checklist should be completed for every research project that involves human participants. It is used to determine the amount of risk of harm entailed in a proposed study and to identify whether an application for ethical approval needs to be submitted. Before completing this form, please refer to the College Policy on the Ethical Approval of Research. The primary supervisor is responsible for exercising appropriate professional judgement in this review.**

**Ethical approval, where required, must be obtained before potential participants are approached to take part in any research.**

| | | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Does the study involve human participants or data? | ☐ | ☐ |
| 2 | Are you sourcing participants or data through an external source? | ☐ | ☐ |
| 3 | Does the study involve participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent? (e.g., children, people with learning disabilities, your own students) | ☐ | ☐ |
| 4 | Will the study require the co-operation of a gatekeeper for initial access to the groups or individuals to be recruited? (e.g., students at school, members of self-help group) | ☐ | ☐ |
| 5 | Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge and consent at the time? (e.g., covert observation of people in non-public places) | ☐ | ☐ |
| 6 | Will the study involve the discussion of sensitive topics (e.g., sexual activity, drug use)? | ☐ | ☐ |
| 7 | Could the study induce psychological stress or anxiety or cause harm or negative consequences beyond the risks encountered in normal life? | ☐ | ☐ |
| 8 | Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants? | ☐ | ☐ |
| 9 | Will the study involve the recruitment of patients or their relatives/carers through Health and Social Care? | ☐ | ☐ |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 10 | **Will the study involve patients who are cared for in private and voluntary sector nursing homes and/or residents of residential care homes (Northern Ireland only)?** | ☐ | ☐ |

Appendix 3: Generative AI Guidance for PGR Students

# Union Theological College

## Generative AI Guidance for PGR Students

**Postgraduate research students may, should they wish, make limited use of generative AI tools in their research. However, this should be done with full awareness of the guiding principles from the College's Academic Integrity Policy and matters of virtue. It highlights how in academic assessments, passing off someone–or in this case something's–work as your own constitutes academic misconduct. This might involve failing to cite a source you have relied upon, getting someone else to complete a section of your dissertation, or presenting machine-translated work as your own.**

**Students might wish to use generative AI in these ways:**

- **to brainstorm ideas;**
- **to get quick general definitions of concepts;**
- **to check spelling and grammar; and**
- **to organise or summarise information.**

**However, there are other significant reasons why doctoral students should be very cautious about their use of generative AI tools.**

**You should be aware that there are risks and disadvantages associated with over-use of generative AI to support learning and research. There is growing evidence to suggest that the over-use of such tools can negatively affect your learning by reducing your capacity for critical thinking. Should you routinely use generative AI to summarise books or journal articles you will not be cultivating your own advanced skills of critical analysis. All learning is hard work and short-cuts like this are no substitute for the skills developed by doing the work yourself. The use of such tools can detract from the intellectual practices and skills that researchers need to display throughout the course of their PhD: original thinking, creativity, problem-solving, and higher order thinking.**

**These tools are usually trained using data from webpages, social media conversations, survey data, private datasets and other online content. They generate outputs by identifying and repeating common patterns, e.g., the words that typically follow other words. This is usually done by ingesting large datasets and statistically analysing the distribution of words or pixels or other elements in the data. Large Language Models (LLMs) which make up common GenAI tools like ChatGPT or Microsoft**

Copilot can synthesise huge quantities of content at pace. Although these tools have been trained on more text than a human could ever read, the data set is not sourced by the discipline-specific methodology. While the output from such tools often appears convincing and reliable, the results are strongly influenced by the data that AI tools have been trained on and so they can perpetuate false or harmful biases, fabricate information, and make errors. The data set may miss significant areas of information and/or be overly reliant on outdated information. Therefore, whilst the results often can be accurate, they cannot be judged to be reliable, and they can contain straightforward mistakes. Remember, you are simply being provided with the words that statistically would be most likely to appear in a response to the prompt you provided. This means that you always need to verify the accuracy of its outputs.

Whilst you may make limited use of these tools in your research, it is recommended that you avoid using generative AI in the writing of any text to be included in your dissertation. This is for a number of reasons.

At PhD level it can never be appropriate to submit text that has been duplicated from another source without clear acknowledgement. AI tools cannot take responsibility for the content of a response and so should not be regarded as an author that can be cited because the outputs simply imitate or summarise existing content. Since generative AI tools produce text on a prediction model, they cannot be deemed a source of material to be quoted as an authority. To use their findings significantly increases the risk of plagiarism because in most cases it is impossible to trace the source of the information used to generate the response. These factors can make the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable practice very unclear, and it may be too easy to shift from acceptable to unacceptable practice.

For doctoral researchers, it is important to note that one of the core requirements of a PhD thesis is that it should demonstrate the capability of pursuing original research that makes a significant contribution to knowledge or understanding in the field of study. Many AI tools utilise user information to train future models and therefore there is significant uncertainty about the privacy of any content uploaded. When using these tools personal data may be collected, stored and shared with other third parties. It is very important to be careful about any information that you provide because you risk putting your original contribution into the public domain prior to publication. Having uploaded the dissertation into an AI tool may have repercussions for the potential publication of the thesis. This is because publishers often have requirements not to upload work intended for

publication in order to protect the value of an author's work and to avoid compromising intellectual property rights.

The examinations which take place at differentiation and the final oral viva examination are ones in which the examiners are to establish to their own satisfaction that the submissions genuinely are the student's own work. Most importantly, to meet the criteria for the award of the doctorate, the dissertation must demonstrate a significant contribution to knowledge. To use material generated by AI risks an undesirable outcome in the assessment of that work. In the viva examiners will often ask a student to do some, or all, of the following: to explain or justify research decisions; to discuss specific sources that have been cited; to locate the project within the existing field of research; and to provide evidence of how the thesis makes an original contribution. Overreliance or misuse of AI tools compromises a student's ability to offer satisfactory answers to those questions.

## Guiding principles for PGR supervisors

- Supervisors should ensure that students are familiar with this guidance. Any discussion about the possible use of AI in a project should be documented in the report of the supervision.
- Supervisors must not upload any part of a student's submission into a generative AI tool.

## Guiding principles for PGR students

1. Students are responsible for maintaining a critical oversight of any use that they make of generative AI and must be able to explain and justify that use to the examiners.
2. Students must be transparent about their use of generative AI and it will be assumed that all of the dissertation is a student's own work unless it is acknowledged otherwise.
3. Student use of generative AI must align with the Academic Integrity Policy and the declaration made upon submission.
4. Student use of generative AI must align with their development as a researcher.

Appendix 4: Summary of PhD Supervision Meeting

# Union Theological College

## Summary of PhD Supervision Meeting

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Present at meeting** | **Name** | | **Status** |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| **Date of meeting** | | **Nature of meeting** | **formal / informal**<br>**(delete as appl.)** |
| **Summary of discussion** | | | |
| **Action points** | | | |

**Form completed by student on** _____

**Form completed by primary supervisor on** _____

Appendix 5: Differentiation (Confirmation of PhD Student Status)

# Union Theological College

## Differentiation (Confirmation of PhD Student Status)

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name of Student** | |
| **Primary Supervisor** | |
| **Recommendation of the Differentiation Panel to the Research Committee** | |
| **The Panel recommends that this student may/may not differentiate to PhD student status.** | |
| **Rationale for decision** | |
| | |
| **Where, appropriate, conditions for differentiation and further review date.** | |
| | |
| **Differentiation Panel Members** | |
| **Name** | |
| **Name** | |
| | |
| **Signed** | |
| **Signed** | |
| **Date** | |

**Recommendation approved/not approved by Research Committee**

**Signed:**

**Date:**

**Comments:**

# Union Theological College

## Postgraduate Research Student Annual Progress Review

### Section 1 (to be completed by the postgraduate research student)

| | |
|---|---|
| **Student name:** | |
| **Academic year:** | |
| **Enter date of first registration as a postgraduate research student:** | |
| **If application, enter date of differentiation, i.e., confirmation of status:** | |
| **Current registration status i.e., full time or part time:** | |
| **Title of thesis:** | |
| **Primary supervisor:** | |
| **If appropriate, has your project received research ethics approval?**<br><br>**If yes, please indicate the date of approval:** | |

**Summary of work completed since last review or, if no previous review has taken place, since the commencement of study (200–300 words):**

**Updated thesis plan (minimum 250 words, appending additional material as necessary):**

**Updated timetable of future work (with specific dates):**

**Regarding professional development, please give brief details of training courses, conferences, teaching, marking, publication, membership of bodies, etc. from the last academic year:**

***Once section 1 is completed the form should be forwarded to the primary supervisor.***

## Section 2 (to be completed by the primary supervisor)

**Primary supervisor's comments on research project and its progress:**

**Any additional comment from others in the supervision team:**

**Name:**

**Date:**

***Once section 2 is completed please forward as appropriate.***

## Section 3 (if the project is being conducted within the framework of a collaborative arrangement, please forward the form to programme liaison)

**Please confirm that the Code of Practice has been followed and relevant supervision records are retained.**

**Name:**

**Date:**

## Section 4 (Please forward to Director of Postgraduate Research for completion by the Research Committee's appointed reviewer)

**Reviewer's Name:**

**Reviewer's report:**

**Is the recommendation to the Research Committee that the student proceed? YES/NO**

**Comments:**

**Decision of Research Committee:**

**Date:**

**For students who are completing the final year of their normal period of study (3 years FT; 6 years PT), can they be permitted going forward to register as 'Thesis Only'? YES/NO**

# Improving Your Academic Writing Skills
# A Guide for PGR Students

## 1. Read actively by writing

**It is important to begin generating prose as soon as possible and so, even in the initial research for any topic, it is best to read and write at the same time. Try to produce notes that do not simply duplicate the content of what you are reading. Instead, try to move towards analysis in the notes that you take.**

**More generally, as you read the best literature within your discipline, pay attention to the craft that is on display. Try to absorb as much as you can about the structure of sentences and the construction of paragraphs. Observe how the thesis is introduced, developed, and concluded. Pay attention to how sources are handled and appealed to. Notice the tone, vocabulary, and posture of the writing. Where you come across particularly effective strategies or techniques take a note of them in a log. This will be something that you can turn to on future occasions to help spark ideas about how to revise and improve material that you have drafted.**

**In your reading, think of placing yourself in the position of an apprentice. Watch the most experienced artisans at work and try to replicate what is best about how they go about the craft. In particular, try to follow what they do in setting out their aims and the thesis, how they structure paragraphs, build their arguments, and write with limpid prose. Imitate and then innovate in order to help you find your own voice as a writer.**

## 2. Establish habits of writing

**Treat writing as a discipline that you are seeking develop rather than simply a task that needs to be completed. Persevere in seeking to cultivate good habits of writing. Do not wait for perfect clarity on any given topic before you start to write but, instead, think of writing as a means to develop and advance your thinking.**

**In the PhD programme your thesis and its original contribution to knowledge is of paramount importance. We recommend that you keep revising a one-page summary of your overall argument in order to help you give it due priority. This is something like the abstract of your dissertation and it is a good habit to revisit in order to refine and advance it.**

**Another good habit is to avoid the use of too many short paragraphs in your formal writing. Instead aim to write in significant paragraphs, each having its own introductory sentence, a significant body, and a concluding sentence. Disciplined paragraphs like this will open with a topic sentence, develop one main idea, and then summarise the point and transition to the next major paragraph.**

**At a level above this, ensure that you provide adequate signposting to help a reader follow your argument. This will help to ensure logical progression between the sections of your dissertation.**

## 3. Develop an appropriate scholarly voice

**In order to adopt appropriate tone and posture remember to do the following:**

- Utilise specific language rather than vague expressions and generalities.
- Ensure that the tone remains appropriate for a formal style of academic writing.
- Aim for clarity of expression in smooth and readable prose, remembering that depth does not require complexity in your prose.
- Try to embrace an appropriate level of objectivity and avoid adopting a sermonic tone unless it is justified by the context of your writing.
- Balance confidence and modesty in your claims. In other words, be clear and assertive about your argument whilst recognising limitations and weaknesses. A careful and judicious argument will be much more persuasive than one marked by unnuanced sweeping statements.

## 4. Consider revision to be one of the most significant parts of writing

Once you have produced a draft piece of work you, hopefully, will have captured some significant ideas. The challenge is then to rework and polish it to ensure that it states your case in the most effective manner. Do not underestimate how much time such revision can take. It can be helpful to think of revising your work at different levels.

- At the macro level, revise the work giving your main attention to the structure, coherence, and flow of the argument.
- At the micro level, there will be sentences that need to be rewritten because they are unclear and require work on syntax, grammar, and punctuation.
- At the stylistic level, revise the footnotes and formatting of the piece.

There are some helpful ways to go above revising your written work.

- Read your piece aloud because this can reveal awkward phrasing and convoluted sentences. This can also help you identify awkward phrasing and verbal repetition.
- Print your work out instead of always looking at it on a screen. If this is not possible change the formatting so that you see the same words in different places.
- Above all, allow some time to pass before polishing and final proofreading to allow you to revisit your writing with fresh eyes.

Watch out for some common pitfalls:

- work that is largely descriptive without appropriate analysis;
- not making the application of your methodology explicit;
- failing to define important terminology;
- overreliance on secondary literature;
- neglect of structure;
- over- or under-stating your case; and
- failing to spell out the point

## 5. Seeking feedback and peer engagement

Be sure to seek targeted feedback from your supervisor not just about your understanding of your area of research but about the strength of your argument, how you can improve clarity, and how better to engage with your sources. Be open to such critique and be willing to revise material substantially in response to it.

It can also be helpful to seek feedback from fellow PhD students. Be willing to share drafts of your work and to heed constructive feedback. Seek out other postgraduate students in different institutions who are working in your field and try to do the same with them.

**The annual College PhD symposium offers an opportunity to present work to your peers and to build relationships with those who might be willing to engage with your writing.**

Appendix 8: Dissertation Submission Guidance

# Union Theological College

## Dissertation Submission Guidance

**Writing up and submitting the thesis in line with the timescales set out in Code of Practice should be the priority in a student's final year. In preparation for thesis submission, student and supervisor should agree a timetable for completing the thesis; this includes giving notice of the intention to submit.**

**Ensure that the Union Theological College Style Guide has been implemented and the regulations of the Code of Practice have been adhered to. The word count of the dissertation should not normally be fewer than 80,000 words or greater than 100,000 words (including footnotes but excluding bibliography and any appendices). The inclusion of any appendices requires prior approval from the Research Committee.**

**The dissertation must acknowledge and reference the work of others as per the Union Theological College Academic Integrity Policy.**

## Format of dissertation

1. **Title page, which should include:**
   - **Full title of thesis**
   - **Author's name with postnominal abbreviations of previous degrees (e.g. John Brown BA MDiv)**
   - **The name of the institution (either Union Theological College or that of a PhD partner institution)**
   - **The following statement: 'A dissertation submitted to the Presbyterian Theological Faculty, Ireland, for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy'**
   - **Date of presentation i.e. the month and year in which the thesis is submitted for assessment (in the case of a thesis which is resubmitted, the date of resubmission should be shown as the date of presentation).**
2. **Directly following the title page comes a declaration stating:**

   **'This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the preface and specified in the text. It is not substantially the same as any work that has already been submitted, or is being concurrently submitted, for any degree,**

diploma or other qualification. It falls within the prescribed word limit outlined in the Code of Practice.'

3. The next page should include an abstract which summarises the thesis, highlighting the main argument, method, and overall contribution of the research. This should comprise not fewer than 250 words and not more than 350 words.
4. Any preface(s)
5. A full table of contents (consider using the word processor tool to insert this)
6. Lists of any tables, figures, images, maps etc.
7. The main body of the dissertation, its bibliography, and any appendices
8. Note that no index is required.

## Page setup

The minimum margins should be a left margin of 4cm (to allow for binding) and right, top, and bottom margins of 2.5cm. The pages and illustrations must be numbered consecutively. The text may be presented in either 1.5 of 2.0 line spacing.

## Proofreading and checking

Ensure that the text has been carefully checked to remove typographical, spelling and grammatical errors. It is not the responsibility of the supervisor to proofread the work for you. Remember that the bibliography should be presented in an acceptable format according to the conventions of the style guide (your supervisor should be able to advise you on any subject-specific requirements). Check that all references are cited accurately, and every reference cited in the text is given in the bibliography and vice-versa. Finally, ensure that all pages are present and correctly numbered and located in the document.

## Submission of dissertation via the VLE

A student may submit the dissertation for scrutiny via Turnitin prior to formal submission via the relevant module shell on the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). This provides an opportunity to see any issues which might need to be addressed prior to final submission.

For formal submission the final dissertation should be uploaded in both MS Word format and PDF format.

**Note, it is not possible to 'retract submission' or to send a revised copy directly to your examiners. Therefore, you should check the files prior to the final formal submission very carefully.**

Appendix 9: Notice of Intention to Submit PhD Dissertation

# Union Theological College

## Notice of Intention to Submit PhD Dissertation

**Students must give at least three months' notice to the Research Committee of intention to submit their thesis. This form should be sent to the Director of Postgraduate Research.**

**Note that any change to the title of the dissertation requires prior approval by the Research Committee.**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name of student** | |
| **Primary supervisor** | |
| **Title of thesis** | |
| | |
| **Commencement date** | |
| **Mode of study (full time or part time)** | |
| **Proposed date of submission** | |
| | |
| **Signed (student)** | |
| **Date** | |
| **Consent of supervision team for submission and examination** | |
| **Signed (primary supervisor)** | |
| **Date** | |
| **Signed (Faculty supervisor)** | |
| **Dated** | |
| | |
| **This form should be submitted to the Director of Postgraduate Research.** | |
| | |
| **Date received:** | |

Appendix 10: Nomination of Examiner for PhD Oral Examination

# Union Theological College
# Nomination of Examiner for PhD Oral Examination

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name of student** | |
| **Name of primary supervisor** | |
| **PROPOSED EXAMINER** | |
| **Name (including title)** | |
| **Address** | |
| | |
| **E-Mail address** | |
| **Institution/employer** | |
| | |
| **Post held** | |
| | |
| **Rationale for the nomination**<br>**The examiner must demonstrate previous experience of research degree supervision and/or supervision, and must be a subject specialist in the subject area of the thesis. CV must be attached to nomination form.** | |
| | |
| **Signed** | |
| **Date** | |

**Approved by Faculty Yes/No**

**Signed**

**Date**

**Comments:**

Appendix 11: Nomination of Convener (Chair) for PhD Oral Examination

# Union Theological College

## Nomination of Convener (Chair) for PhD Oral Examination

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name of Student** | |
| **Name of Primary Supervisor** | |
| **Proposed Convener** | |
| **Name** | |
| **Rationale for Proposal**<br>**The convener must normally be a permanent member of Faculty of the College with experience of supervision and examining of research degrees, and must not have been involved in the supervision of the candidate** | |
| | |

**Signed:**

**Date:**

**Approved by Faculty: Yes/No**

**Date:**

**Comments:**

Appendix 12: Preparing for Your Viva Guidance

# Union Theological College

## Preparing for Your Viva Guidance

**This guide is designed to clarify the purpose of your viva examination, outline what you can expect during the process, and offer practical suggestions and strategies to help you prepare effectively and communicate with confidence.**

## What is the viva?

**The *viva voce* (with the living voice) examination, commonly referred to as the viva, is an oral examination in which you are required to defend your thesis and demonstrate the quality of your research. Typically held within three months of submitting your thesis, the viva is a compulsory component for the award of a postgraduate research degree.**

**The Code of Practice outlines what is being assessed when you submit your thesis for examination. We could draw this out and say that your examiners will be assessing the following during your viva:**

- **Is the thesis an original work that makes a significant contribution to knowledge in or understanding of the field of study?**
- **Does the dissertation contain material worthy of publication?**
- **Does the thesis demonstrate adequate knowledge of the field of study and relevant literature and methodologies?**
- **Are there points of ambiguity?**
- **Does the thesis show the exercise of critical judgement with regard to both your own work and that of other scholars in the same field?**
- **Is the presentation and style of the dissertation of an appropriate standard?**

**You will normally have two examiners who will review your thesis and will be responsible for assessing your work during your viva examination. The examination usually lasts between one to three hours. The length of the viva is not necessarily an indication of either a problematic thesis or an excellent one.**

**People often refer to the viva as a defence of the thesis. During the viva, you will have the opportunity to engage in a detailed discussion of your thesis with your examiners. Your task is to demonstrate that the work is original, that it is your own, and that it makes a meaningful contribution to knowledge. While the viva is a formal oral examination, it should also be a critical dialogue centred on an area of research in which you are the expert. Consequently, you should approach it with appropriate confidence in your ability to defend your work.**

Examiners will be looking for clear evidence that you have conducted the research independently and can articulate the rationale, methodology, and findings of your study. You should also be able to demonstrate a strong understanding of the significance of your work and its relevance within the broader academic context, including its relationship to the most up-to-date research in the field. Remember, you are the researcher who carried out the investigation and critical analysis that shaped your thesis. As such, you are best placed to speak authoritatively about your work and its contribution to your discipline.

## Arrangements

Once you have submitted your thesis, it is important to begin preparing for your viva. Establishing the date and location of the examination as early as possible—typically two to three months in advance—will give you sufficient time to prepare. While arrangements are usually made by Union Theological College staff, it remains your responsibility to ensure you are fully informed of the details. You should also be aware of the identity of your examiners. A member of the Union College Faculty will be the independent chair, and—with your permission—your supervisor may attend. Please note that neither the chair nor your supervisor will be involved in the formal assessment of your thesis.

## Preparation

It is important to familiarise yourself with your examiners and their areas of research, particularly if you are not already acquainted with their work. Reading some of their recent publications can offer valuable insight into their research interests, approaches, and methodologies. This understanding may help you anticipate the kinds of questions or topics they are likely to raise during the examination.

Take time to read through your thesis thoroughly—word by word—rather than skimming. As you do so, highlight both its strengths and any areas that may be weaker or less clearly explained. Approach the text critically, identifying sections that might benefit from further clarification or additional detail. Make notes on these areas and consider how you would respond if questioned about them during the viva. Demonstrating awareness of both the strengths and limitations of your work shows examiners that you have engaged in thoughtful, critical reflection on your research. Examiners will often ask questions about methodology, issues that remain unexamined as well as directions for further research.

Your examiners may well ask questions covering both the fundamental knowledge of the discipline as well as particular questions about your area of specialist expertise. As part of your preparation, it is important to review this foundational knowledge to ensure you can respond confidently and accurately.

**You are likely to be asked questions like these:**

- **What original contribution has your thesis made to this field of study?**
- **Explain the main research questions you were hoping to address.**
- **What are the strengths and weaknesses of your thesis?**
- **If you had to start the research project again, what would you do differently?**
- **What are your plans for the development of this research?**

**There are a variety of different strategies that might help you to prepare for the viva. For example, consider the following:**

- **Try to identify the sorts of questions that examiners may ask and to formulate answers to them. In particular, identify the aspects of methodology or evidence that are most likely to be challenged.**
- **Arrange a mock viva with some of your peers. Allow them to read your dissertation and point out areas that they, perhaps, found confusing or less clear. Ask them to quiz you on the thesis.**
- **Practise your pitch by developing a concise explanation of your thesis, its importance, and its contribution to the field.**
- **Mark up your dissertation to help you to refer to it in the viva**
- **List any minor corrections that you have identified during your preparation**

## The pre-viva examination

**Your dissertation will be sent to the examiners who will write independent reports outlining their preliminary views of the thesis. These are exchanged before the viva and the examiners normally hold an initial conversation to discuss their initial views and to identify questions to address during the exam.**

## The viva itself

**Give yourself plenty of time to find the venue. If it happens to be online make sure that there is a reliable connection to the internet. Ensure that you have a copy of your dissertation and a pen and paper to note down any specific points that the examiners might raise with you. Water will be provided for you. There is no formal dress code but most candidates dress smartly as a mark of respect to the examiners.**

**Most examiners will want to put you at ease at the start of the viva by asking something of a fairly general nature about how and why you came to work on this particular project. Other general questions might include:**

- **What are the main findings of your thesis?**
- **What is original about what your work?**
- **Who are the other researchers in your field whose work influenced you the most?**

- What do you think is your most interesting finding?
- Did you have any difficulties in locating or accessing material in archives?
- What was the most significant challenge you have faced in this work?

More specific questions on your dissertation might include:

- Have you seen the recently published article by X? What do you think of it?
- Was there any reason for not mentioning the X's monograph when discussing Y?
- Do you feel you were a bit hard on X's work?
- Why did you select your chosen methodology and reject others?
- How have you reconciled conflicting accounts or viewpoints?
- Can you really draw that conclusion from the findings?

Examiners will want to explore both the strengths and limitations of your research, and may ask whether you have identified any areas for improvement. Their aim is not to catch you out, but to engage you in a thoughtful discussion and help you articulate your knowledge in response to their questions. While the questions may be challenging—as they are intended to assess whether your work meets the standard required for the award of the degree—they are not designed to be trick questions. Be aware that examiners vary in their questioning styles, depending on their experience and personal approach. Some may come across as more direct or critical, but this should not be taken personally. Stay calm, listen carefully, and respond thoughtfully. Demonstrating composure and a willingness to engage critically with your work will reflect well on your performance. Disagreement does not necessarily indicate that an examiner believes your research falls short of the required standard. Continue to engage confidently in the discussion, demonstrating your ability to defend and reflect critically on your work.

Remember, you can ask for questions to be repeated or for clarification. Pause and take time to think before responding. Be ready to engage in dialogue. It is quite acceptable to consult your thesis during the viva if you want to refer to a particular point that you made.

## After the viva

You will normally be informed of the outcome of your viva shortly after the examination. It is common practice for the examiners to ask you to leave the room (or be moved to a virtual waiting room) in order to confer following the viva. It is common for them to then call you back in order to communicate their initial recommendation to you directly. Note that the outcome cannot be formally confirmed at this point. The various recommendations that the examiners can make are set out in the 'Recommendation of Examiners: Joint

**Report' template in the PhD Code of Practice. This final examiners' report will be brought to the next PTFI exam board which is the body with the power to award degrees.**

Appendix 13: Examination of PhD Dissertation: Preliminary Independent Report

# Union Theological College

## Examination of PhD Dissertation: Preliminary Independent Report

**Once completed, this form should be sent to the Convener (Chair) of the viva.**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name of student** | |
| **Title of thesis** | |
| | |
| **Name of examiner** | |
| | |
| | |
| **Report of the examiner on the thesis** | |
| | |
| **Provisional recommendation** | |
| | |
| **Signed** | |
| **Date** | |

Appendix 14: Recommendation of Examiners: Joint Report

# Union Theological College

## Recommendation of Examiners: Joint Report

**Once completed, this form should be returned to the Convener (Chair) of the viva.**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name of student** | |
| **Title of thesis** | |
| | |
| **The Examination Board** | |
| | |
| | |
| **Convener (Chair)** | |
| | |
| **Report of the examiners on the thesis** | |

**Report of the Examiners on the Oral Examination**

**Recommendations:**

**The Examiners are requested to check the recommendation which applies:**

1. **The Doctoral degree be awarded as the thesis stands.**
2. **The Doctoral degree be awarded subject to corrections* being made to the thesis that must be completed within three months of the oral examination.**
3. **The Doctoral degree be awarded subject to corrections* being made to the thesis that must be completed within six months of the oral examination.**
4. **The thesis be revised and resubmitted for the Doctoral degree* within twelve months.**
5. **A Master of Philosophy be awarded as the thesis stands.**
6. **No degree be awarded and no resubmission permitted.****

***A typed list of these amendments should be attached to this form.**
****** **A typed list of the deficiencies should be attached to this form.**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Signed:** | |
| **Date:** | |

Appendix 15: Report of the Convener of the PhD Examination

# Union Theological College

## Report of the Convener of the PhD Examination

**Once completed, this form should be sent to the Director of Postgraduate Research.**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name of student:** | |
| **Title of thesis:** | |
| | |
| **The Examination Board:** | |
| | |
| | |
| **Convener (Chair):** | |
| | |
| **Report of the convener on the conduct of the oral examination:** | |
| **Recommendations** | |
| **The Examiners are requested to check the recommendation which applies:**<br><br>1. **The Doctoral degree be awarded as the thesis stands.**<br>2. **The Doctoral degree be awarded subject to corrections* being made to the thesis that must be completed within three months of the oral examination.**<br>3. **The Doctoral degree be awarded subject to corrections* being made to the thesis that must be completed within six months of the oral examination.**<br>4. **The thesis be revised and resubmitted for the Doctoral degree* within twelve months.**<br>5. **A Master of Philosophy be awarded as the thesis stands.**<br>6. **No degree be awarded and no resubmission permitted.****<br>***A typed list of these amendments should be attached to this form.**<br>**** A typed list of the deficiencies should be attached to this form.** | |
| **Signed** | |
| | |

| | |
|---|---|
| | |
| **Convener** | |
| **Date** | |
| | |
| **Recommendation approved/ not approved by the Research Committee** | |
| **Signed** | |
| **Date** | |
| **Comments** | |
| | |

Appendix 16: Thesis Deposit Forms

# Thesis Deposit Form. Part A.

## Gamble Library

### To be completed by the Student and bound in with the thesis

| | |
|---|---|
| **Full name:** | |
| **Degree:** | |
| **Thesis title:** | |

**I give permission for my thesis to be made available for consultation only in the Gamble Library of Union Theological College, (please tick or complete as appropriate):**

**Immediately:** ☐ **After an embargo period of** ☐ **years. (Maximum 5 years).**

**Signature:** **Date:**

### To be completed by the Convener of the PhD Examination

**I certify that this is the final copy of the submitted work and that all required amendments have been completed and submitted within the required deadline.**

**Name of Convener:**

**Signature:** **Date:**

# Thesis Deposit Form. Part B.

Gamble Library

**To be completed by the Student and emailed to j.conkey@union.ac.uk**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Full name:** | |
| **Degree:** | |
| **Thesis title:** | |
| **Summary:** | |

**I give permission for a full text PDF of my thesis to be made available on the British Library's EThOS system:**

**Immediately:** ☐ **After an embargo period of** ☐ **years.**

**Never. Just display the title, author, and summary, etc.** ☐

**Reason for embargo:**

☐ **The thesis is due for publication, either as a series of articles or as a monograph**

☐ **The thesis includes material that was obtained under a promise of confidentiality**

☐ **Having access would substantially prejudice the commercial interests of the author, the Gamble Library, Union Theological College, or an external company**

☐ **It contains information which may endanger the physical or mental health, or personal safety of an individual (or individuals).**

**Signature:** **Date:**

**(Staff use only. Embargo(s) granted by Supervisor? Yes: _____ No: _____).**

Appendix 17: PhD Regulations

# Union Theological College
## PhD Regulations

## 1. Registration

1.1 Students must register at the start of research and at the beginning of every subsequent academic year. Registration in the second and subsequent years shall be subject to satisfactory progress reports and there being no outstanding fees.

1.2 The following registration statuses are applicable:

i. Full-time - Full-time registration is for students who intend to complete the programme within the normal full-time period of three years. This incurs the full-time fee.

ii. Part-time - Part-time registration is for students who intend to complete the programme within the normal part-time period of six years. This incurs the part-time fee.

iii. Graduation Only - Once a thesis has been submitted/resubmitted for examination, the student's status will be changed to Graduation Only. No further tuition fee is incurred.

iv. Thesis Resubmission - Where a student is required to revise and resubmit a thesis, the status is changed to Thesis Resubmission and the student will be liable for a resubmission charge.

1.3 Students who have registered for a particular period as full-time or part-time must apply through their supervisors to the Research Committee (RC) for permission for any change in registration during that period.

## 2. Period of Study

2.1 Time spent in achieving a Master's degree does not count as part of the time allowed for completion of a Doctorate.

2.2 The minimum, normal and maximum periods of full-time (FT) or part-time (PT) study in years permitted for submission of research degree programmes shall be:

| Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) | Minimum Period | Normal Period | Maximum Period |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 2 (FT) or 4 (PT) | 3 (FT) or 6 (PT) | 4 (FT) or 8 (PT) |

2.3 The maximum period within which students must submit all research elements required for the degree for examination is calculated from the date of first registration. These periods exclude suspension, but not extension, of studies.

2.4 Students shall be expected to submit within the normal period of study. Any requests to submit earlier (within the minimum period), or later (within the maximum period) must be submitted to

the RC for consideration and approval. In exceptional circumstances, a request to allow an extension beyond the maximum period must be endorsed by the RC, and approved by the Faculty.

2.5 For any extension beyond the normal period, an action plan shall be agreed with the student setting out what needs to be achieved during the extension period.

2.6 Students who are granted an extension beyond the normal period and are in receipt of funding for their programme should confirm the impact this may have on their funding.

2.7 For students permitted to transfer from full-time to part-time registration, and vice versa, one unit of full-time registration shall be considered equivalent to two units of part-time registration.

## 3. Temporary Withdrawal

3.1 Students may apply to withdraw voluntarily from their programme on a temporary basis, subject to consultation with their supervisors and the approval of the RC.

3.2 A person on temporary withdrawal does not possess entitlements to any rights or privileges associated with student status, unless this is expressly stated in a letter from the College stipulating the person's status and entitlements.

3.3 The RC may permit students to withdraw temporarily from the programme for a period of up to one year at a time, up to a cumulative maximum of two years, where it is satisfied that good cause exists or continues to exist.

3.4 A period of permitted temporary withdrawal shall not count as part of the time allowed by the College for submission or completion.

3.5 Students who do not resume at the appropriate time, and who do not seek permission to withdraw temporarily shall be deemed to have withdrawn from the College.

3.6 Any suspension or extension to the period of study of visa-holding students must be reported to the College Office as soon as it is known, for report to UK Visas and Immigration.

## 4. Progress

### 4.1 Supervision

4.1.1 It is the responsibility of the Faculty to appoint the supervisory team for each research degree student. The team will consist of a primary supervisor, a faculty supervisor and, if appropriate, a consultant supervisor. In no circumstances may a student have more than three supervisors at any one time. The primary supervisor shall have overall responsibility for the student and the research. It is the responsibility of the student to interact with the team, normally through the primary supervisor.

**4.1.2** Research Supervisors will:

i. Typically, be drawn from members of Faculty, UTC Research Associates, or senior scholars considered appropriate by the Research Committee; and

ii. Be experienced in and actively engaged in research (while recognizing the unique manner in which theory and practice overlap in theological research); and

iii. Hold a research degree at the same level as, or higher than, the degree being supervised.

4.1.3 Research Teams will include:

i. At least two Supervisors appointed by the Faculty.

ii. At least one member who is currently engaged in relevant or related research, so as to ensure that the direction and monitoring of the student's progress is informed by subject knowledge and research developments.

4.1.4 Given that the College is a small specialist institution, it will be necessary to appoint adjunct supervisors. Such appointees will be designated as Research Associates and receive remuneration for their supervisory duties in line with fees agreed by Faculty.

4.1.5 If, for any reason, a primary supervisor shall be unavailable for contact by a student for a significant period which impinges negatively on the progress of the student's project, a permanent replacement shall be appointed as primary supervisor.

4.1.6 A supervisor may not normally be the primary supervisor for more than six full-time (or equivalent) research students at any one time.

4.1.7 Supervisory responsibilities can be changed at the request of a student or a supervisor. Normally, any change of supervisor shall by application to the Research Committee and subject to approval by the Faculty. If, for any reason, a change of supervisor(s) is required during the period of the research, the above criteria shall apply to the appointment of the new supervisor(s).

4.1.8 At an initial supervisory meeting between the student and the primary supervisor the following shall be agreed:

i. Roles and responsibilities of the student and each member of the supervisory team.

ii. The frequency, duration and format of formal meetings.

iii. Any requirements for ethical approval of the proposed research which is obtained through application to the College Research Committee in line with the College Policy on the Ethical Approval of Research.

## 4.2 Research Plan

4.2.1 Both full-time and part-time research students must agree a research plan with their primary supervisor at the outset of the research (which should be updated as appropriate throughout the period of study), and attend courses and perform research work as specified in the research plan.

## 5.1 Regular Progress Monitoring

5.1.1. There shall be eight formal meetings per year between the primary supervisor and full-time student (four for part-time students) to monitor progress against the research plan. Summaries of the meetings shall be retained as records.

5.1.2. A supervisor who has concerns about a student's progress at times other than the normal Annual Progress Review period shall inform the student in writing of the areas of concern and invite the student to a meeting to discuss the concerns. Following the meeting, and taking account of all known circumstances, the supervisor(s) may do one of the following:

i. Agree a plan of action for the student, with a review date, and monitor the student's attendance, progress and performance during that period. If the student's performance has not improved within the specified period, the supervisors shall notify the Director of Postgraduate Research or nominee and submit a report for review by the RC.

ii. In exceptional circumstances, notify the Director of Postgraduate Research or nominee and submit a report for review by the RC, without undertaking a period of monitoring.

5.1.3. In either case, where a supervisor report is made to the RC for review of the student's progress, the student shall also be given the opportunity to submit a report. The RC shall inform the student of the outcome of the progress review, and the appropriate registration status.

## 5.2 Differentiation (Confirmation of Status)

5.2.1 Students are admitted as Probationary Research Students and are required to confirm doctoral status (differentiate) at the end of their first year of study. With permission of the primary supervisor earlier confirmation can be requested. The deadline for differentiation is normally after eighteenth months of full-time study (three years for part-time). Any delay beyond this period requires prior approval from the Research Committee.

5.2.2 Confirmation of status normally requires the submission of the following: an outline of the provisional research project (maximum 1,000 words), a forward plan with a schedule and expected dates of completion, a supporting bibliography, and a sample of work such as part of a draft chapter (4,000 – 6,000 words). These submissions will be assessed in an interview with the Differentiation Panel (5.2). With the student's permission, the primary supervisor may ask the Research Committee for permission to be present at the differentiation as an observer.

**5.2.3 The Differentiation Panel shall make one of the following recommendations to the RC regarding progression:**

i. **That the student be permitted to differentiate to PhD student status.**
ii. **That the student's performance is unsatisfactory and that a second attempt at differentiation be held within a specified period (normally 3 months FTE) may be made. Students may not make more than two attempts at differentiation. Students shall normally be offered a second attempt before recommendation iii is made.**
iii. **That the student's performance is unsatisfactory and they may not differentiate and registration on the programme ceases. In such a case, the RC shall invite any student who has received this recommendation to appear before it before the decision is confirmed.**

**5.2.4 Students who are dissatisfied with the outcome of differentiation may submit an academic appeal (research degree programmes) if a ground for appeal is evidenced.**

## 5.3 Annual Progress Review

**5.3.1 The College Director of Postgraduate Research shall receive an annual progress report for each student. If the Research Committee is not satisfied with reported progress, it may convene a review panel for a student. This should comprise two academics not involved in the student's supervision. One member of the supervisory team, preferably the primary supervisor, may be present to provide input, but may not take part in making the final recommendation concerning the student's progress. The Faculty may specify more frequent reviews at its discretion. The normal outcome of the Annual Progress Review is that the student progresses to the next year, unconditionally or subject to the completion of specific targets.**

**5.3.2 The Annual Progress Review report to the Director of Postgraduate Research must contain the following elements:**

i. **A written self-evaluative summary of work completed during the period of the review together with a clear project plan for the remainder of the research period (Appendix 6 section 1).**
ii. **In addition, the primary supervisor should report on the research project to the Director of Postgraduate Research (Appendix 6 section 2).**
iii. **Where the project is being conducted within the framework of a collaborative arrangement the programme liaison should also provide confirmation that all relevant supervision records have been retained (Appendix 6 section 3).**

**The Director of Postgraduate Research will oversee a proposal being brought to the Research Committee whether or not the student may progress. This may include a Progress Review Panel to assess the level of student work.**

**5.3.3 The progress review panel shall make one of the following recommendations regarding progression, for the approval of the RC:**

i. **That the student's performance is satisfactory, and that the student be permitted to proceed to the next stage.**

ii. That, notwithstanding some concerns, which the student and supervisory team should act upon, the student's overall performance is satisfactory, and that the student be permitted to proceed to the next stage.

iii. That the student's performance is unsatisfactory, and that a further assessment be held within a specified period (normally 3 months FTE) to determine whether progress on the programme shall be recommended. Students may not make more than two attempts at Annual Progress Review. Students shall normally be offered a second attempt before recommendation iv is made.

iv. That the student's performance is unsatisfactory and that no submission for a Doctoral degree examination be recommended, and that registration be terminated.

5.3.4 For students who are completing the final year of their normal period of study, the Director of Postgraduate Research shall confirm whether or not the student has completed all the necessary research and is on track to submit.

5.3.5 When necessary, the RC shall consider progress review panel recommendations and shall invite any student who has received a recommendation under iv above to appear before it before the decision is confirmed. The Director of Postgraduate Research shall inform each student of the outcome of the progress review exercise.

5.3.6 Students who are dissatisfied with the outcome of the progress review may submit an academic appeal (research degree programmes) if a ground for appeal is evidenced.

## 6.1 The Research Committee

6.1.1 The Faculty has oversight of research within the College and has delegated certain matters to a Research Committee, chaired by the Director of Postgraduate Research and comprising research-active members of Faculty, one from each academic department. There should be at least one external member. A quorum shall comprise the Chairperson and one other member. Minutes shall be taken as a formal record of RC meetings, and retained.

6.1.2 Students asked to appear before the RC may be accompanied by one person. The individual who accompanies the student will not act as the student's representative or have either a professional or academic legal qualification.

6.1.3 On consideration of any case referred to it, the RC shall have the power to do any one or more of the following as it considers appropriate:

i. To advise students of the course of action considered to be in their best interests with a view to completing a degree or other programmes of the College. This may include temporary withdrawal or transferring to another programme, if appropriate.

ii. To require students to follow a specified course of action to meet specified targets, provided such targets do not normally exceed what would be required for the student to restore their good academic standing.

iii. To require students who have persistently failed progress review to withdraw from their current pathway, or transfer to another programme.

iv. To require students who have persistently failed progress review to withdraw from the College.

6.1.4 Where students fail to satisfy a requirement imposed under ii, the College may either impose a further requirement under ii, or require students to withdraw from the programme or College as appropriate to the circumstances of the case. In such cases the student shall have the right to appear before the RC meeting at which the withdrawal decision is taken or confirmed. All RC decisions shall be confirmed in writing to the student concerned within five working days of the decision being made.

6.1.5 Students who are dissatisfied with the outcome of the examination process may submit an academic appeal (research degree programme) if a ground for appeal is evidenced.

# 7. Assessment/Award

## 7.1 Notice of Intention to Submit

7.1.1 Students shall prepare a detailed timetable for final preparation and submission of the thesis, in consultation with the supervisors, at least six months before the end of the normal period of study.

7.1.2 Students must give at least three months' notice to the RC of intention to submit their thesis. The College Office will provide thesis submission deadlines regarding eligibility for graduation.

7.1.3 Students must be registered as research students in the academic year in which the thesis is submitted.

7.1.4 Students who anticipate being unable to submit by the notified date must apply to the RC for a new date of submission, after consultation with their supervisors.

7.1.5 The primary supervisor must ensure that appropriate sections of the draft thesis have been submitted to the College-recognised similarity checking service, and the report used for feedback purposes, prior to the submission of the thesis.

## 7.2 Title and Format of Thesis

7.2.1 Students shall specify the title of the thesis when giving notice of intention to submit. The title may not be changed thereafter, except with the permission of the Research Committee.

7.2.2 All theses must be written in English.

7.2.3 The length of the thesis should not normally be fewer than 80,000 words and not exceed 100,000 words (including footnotes but excluding the bibliography and any appendices deemed essential support for thesis). The inclusion of any appendices requires prior approval by the Research Committee.

7.2.4 The layout of the thesis must conform to the format described in the Code of Practice for Research Degrees.

7.2.5 The first page of the thesis must give the author's full names, degrees, the approved title of the thesis, the degree for which it is offered, and the date of submission.

## 7.3 Requirements for the Master of Philosophy (MPhil) as an exit award available to examiners following a viva examination

### 7.3.1 Such master's degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

i. A systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of an academic discipline, field of study, or area of professional practice.
ii. A comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship.
iii. Originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline.
iv. Conceptual understanding that enables the student:
    a. To evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline.
    b. To evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses.

### 7.3.2 Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

i. Deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, make sound judgements in the absence of complete data, and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences.
ii. Demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level.
iii. Continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and to develop new skills to a high level.

### 7.3.3 Holders will have:

i. **The qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:**

   a. **The exercise of initiative and personal responsibility.**
   b. **Decision making in complex and unpredictable situations.**
   c. **The independent learning ability required for continuing professional development.**

## 7.4 Requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

### 7.4.1 Doctoral degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

a. **The creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline and merit publication**
b. **A systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline or area of professional practice.**
c. **The general ability to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge, applications or understanding at the forefront of the discipline, and to adjust the project design in the light of unforeseen problems.**
d. **A detailed understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry.**

### 7.4.2 Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

a. **Make informed judgements on complex issues in specialist fields, often in the absence of complete data, and be able to communicate their ideas and conclusions clearly and effectively to specialist and non-specialist audiences.**
b. **Continue to undertake pure and/or applied research and development at an advanced level, contributing substantially to the development of new techniques, ideas, or approaches.**

### 7.4.3 Holders will have:

a. **The qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and largely autonomous initiative in complex and unpredictable situations, in professional or equivalent environments.**

## 7.5 Procedure for Submission

**7.5.1 Students must submit to the College Office two electronic copies of the thesis, (PDF and Word files) to be issued to the internal and external examiners.**

### 7.5.2 On submitting a thesis, students must sign a statement that:

a. The thesis is not one for which in whole or in part a degree has been or will be conferred by any other institution.
b. The thesis is not one for which in whole or in part a degree has already been conferred by this College
c. The work for the thesis is the student's own and that, where material submitted by the student for another degree or work undertaken by the student as part of a research group has been incorporated into the thesis, the extent of the work thus incorporated has been clearly indicated.
d. The composition of the thesis is the student's own work.

## 7.6 Appointment of Examiners

**7.6.1** The RC shall nominate examiners to be formally appointed by Faculty.

**7.6.2** Only persons of seniority and experience within the area of research concerned shall be appointed as examiners.

**7.6.3** The examiners shall not have had substantial co-authoring or collaborative involvement in the student's work, nor examine a thesis whose focus is the examiner's own work, nor have any links, including personal links, with the student which could be perceived to influence their judgement.

**7.6.4** At least one of the examiners should be external to the College and should demonstrate previous experience of research degree supervision and/or examination. Examiners from outside the higher education system, for example from a research institution or religious body, shall be recognised experts in the area of the research. An external examiner must not have been a member of staff or a student of the College at any time during the three years prior to appointment.

**7.6.5** The principal, faculty supervisor, or consultant supervisor may not be appointed as an examiner.

## 7.7 The Examination Process

**7.7.1** The examiners shall each prepare an independent report on the thesis before the oral examination.

**7.7.2** There shall be an oral examination attended by the examiners and independently convened by a Chair who is appointed by the RC.

**7.7.3** The oral examination shall normally take place in the College but may take place via MS Teams.

**7.7.4** The student may not communicate with the examiners about the thesis or examination before the oral examination.

**7.7.5** After the oral examination, the examiners must send the Director of Postgraduate Research all the independent reports plus a joint report which includes one of the following decisions:

a. The Doctoral degree be awarded as the thesis stands.
b. The Doctoral degree be awarded subject to corrections* being made to the thesis that must be completed within three months.
c. The Doctoral degree be awarded subject to corrections* being made to the thesis that must be completed within six months.
d. The thesis be revised and re-submitted** for the Doctoral degree within twelve months.
e. A Master's degree be awarded as the thesis stands.
f. No degree be awarded.

* The chair must submit to the Director of Postgraduate Research, written notification of the corrections required, along with the completed examination forms, within eight working days of the oral examination. Students must complete the corrections to the satisfaction of the internal examiner within three or six months (as determined within the Joint Report) from receipt of the examination outcome letter and notification of the corrections required.

** Revision and re-submission reflects that substantial revisions are required to make the thesis acceptable. The internal examiner must submit to the Director of Postgraduate Research, written notification of the major revisions required, along with the completed examination forms, within eight working days of the oral examination. Students must complete major revisions and resubmit the thesis for re-examination, within twelve months of receipt of the examination outcome letter and notification of the major revisions required. A new oral examination shall be required for the resubmission. Normally, the same examiners as for the original submission shall examine the resubmission.

7.7.6 Students who fail to submit a corrected or revised thesis by the date set by the examiners shall be regarded as having failed the examination and the decisions of the examiners shall lapse.

7.7.7 If the examiners cannot reach agreement on a decision, the independent chair shall notify the Director of Postgraduate Research, who shall arrange for an additional external examiner to be appointed following the procedures set out in 7.6. The additional external examiner shall be informed that the original examiners have been unable to reach agreement and shall be sent the independent reports. The decision of the new external examiner shall be final.

7.7.8 Students who are dissatisfied with the outcome of the examination process may submit an academic appeal (research degree programme) if a ground for appeal is evidenced.

## 7.8 Library Regulations

7.8.1 Where the examiners decide to award a degree and before the result is officially posted, the student must submit to the College two copies of the thesis bound in the manner of a book and certified by an examiner as being the accepted copy of the thesis (containing any amendments required by the examiners) and the approved summary of the work. One of these copies shall be deposited in the Gamble Library and one given to the Primary Supervisor