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Section 1: Introduction

Union Theological College has a longstanding tradition in providing supervision for research degrees up to the level of PhD. For many years, degrees were awarded through the Queen's University of Belfast. From 2020 postgraduate degrees for incoming students are awarded by the Presbyterian Theological Faculty, Ireland (PTFI). Postgraduate research opportunities are offered across all fields of Theology, allowing students to be part of, and benefit from, a research environment in an institution that seeks to promote the highest standards.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) produces the UK Quality Code for Higher Education: Advice and Guidance Research Degrees which acts as the definitive reference point for all UK higher education providers. It outlines what higher education providers are required to do, what they can expect of each other, and what the general public can expect of them. This UTC Code of Practice for Research Degree Programme (PhD) (CPRDP) has been developed with full cognisance of the QAA Quality Code (available at https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/advice-and-guidance-research-degrees.pdf?sfvrsn=b424c181_2).

The QAA Quality Code outlines the following expectation about Doctoral degrees which HEIs are required to meet:

Doctoral degrees: Doctoral degrees are qualifications rooted in original research - the creation of new knowledge or originality in the application of knowledge. The doctorate is, therefore, unique in the array of qualifications offered by higher education providers. Other key reference points for doctoral degrees are the doctoral qualification descriptors included in the national higher education qualification frameworks for England, Wales and Northern Ireland and for Scotland, and the QAA [Doctoral Degree Characteristics Statement](#) (2015).

The purpose of the CPRDP is to demonstrate how UTC meets the guiding principles of the Quality Code. The CPRDP has been written for students, staff and other stakeholders. Supervisors may find the [Supervision](#), and [Progress and Review Arrangements](#) sections particularly useful; while examiners may find the [Assessment](#) section particularly relevant.

Section 2: Higher Education Provider Arrangements

Entry requirements for the PhD programme are set out in the PhD programme specifications.

Criteria for Admissions

Typically, a Master's degree, or equivalent qualification, in theology or a related discipline.

The Faculty can approve the admission of a student with lower or 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).

Degrees taught and assessed in English must be 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.

Annual Review of Research Degree Programmes

UTC undertakes regular reviews of the delivery of its RDP to assure the quality and maintain the academic standards of research degrees, and to provide an indication of the College's progress against national targets. The key areas of data which are assessed include:

- (i) Overview of the student profile including numbers of full time and part time enrolments;
- (ii) Student profile including country of origin, age, gender and disability status;
- (iii) Submission and completion rates;
- (iv) Pass, referral and fail rates;
- (v) Progression and withdrawal rates;
- (vi) Appeals and complaints;
- (vii) Feedback from examiners;
- (viii) Feedback from students.

Section 3: The Research Environment

The Research Environment

UTC seeks to provide a research environment which embeds a culture of research achievement amongst students and staff at the highest level.

In accepting students onto its PhD programme, UTC is committed to:

- (i) Have an appropriate pool of research active staff who are able to fulfil the role of supervisor.
- (ii) Provide appropriate facilities and support (as detailed below).

UTC facilitates effective research by providing access and opportunities to interact with academic staff and research students, for example, through research seminars and peer support networks. Residential students are invited to participate in a wide range of social and academic events, and to demonstrate the skills they have acquired as a postgraduate student. Research seminars provide unique opportunities for students to present their research findings to peers and academics who can provide valuable feedback on the direction of their research. Non-residential students are encouraged to avail of academic events where they reside or online.

Resources and Training

UTC aims to provide a research environment to enable students to access appropriate resources and develop their potential. Upon enrolment, students receive induction support through their supervisor.

UTC provides residential research students with appropriate facilities, normally including a desk in a shared room (for full-time students), access to computing facilities suitable for the research, and library access. Distance learning students should ensure that they have access to appropriate library resources, for which they must make their own arrangements. UTC will provide for distance learning students online access to e-resources that are available to full-time students based in the College. Distance learning students are always welcome to come to Belfast to work in the college library.

Plagiarism and Research Misconduct

UTC seeks to ensure that students are provided with clear and concise advice (and training where relevant) in relation to plagiarism and the consequences of this or any other form of research misconduct. Supervisors provide advice to PGR students on how to cite their evidence. UTC makes use of Unicheck to help students avoid unintentional plagiarism. PGR

students are expected to adhere to UTC's Academic Integrity policy.

Section 4: Selection, Admission and Induction of Students

Admissions Procedures

UTC:

- (i) Our procedures are intended to be fully transparent.
- (ii) We select students on the basis of merit, potential and diversity.
- (iii) We are committed to using procedures that are valid, reliable and relevant to the courses for which application is being made.
- (iv) We endeavour to remove as many barriers to success as possible.
- (v) We carry out all of our procedures with professionalism and diligence.
- (vi) We endeavour to ensure that all communication throughout the admissions process is transparent and explicit.
- (vii) We treat all data with confidentiality, recognising our responsibilities under GDPR legislation.

Information on the RD is available through the [PhD Programme Specification](#) and this CPRDP, both of which are available on the College's website. UTC's policy on admissions is also available on the website: [Admissions Policy for PTFI Programmes](#).

Entry Requirements and the Decision Making Process

The College applies standard criteria and procedures as part of a transparent admission process for all students.

Application information is available online. The application process is completed online. Please note that there is a non-refundable application fee.

Prospective students are required to complete the application and to supply the following as proof that they meet the entrance requirements for this programme:

- Curriculum vitae
- Letter of intent (300-400 words)
- Research proposal
- Sample of academic work (2,000 words)
- Two signed references (at least one of which must be an academic reference)
- Verified academic transcript(s) and a verified copy (or copies) of degree certificates (and, if necessary, an official English translation)
- English language requirement certificate (if applicable)
- A copy of the photo page of your passport (non-EU students)

Decisions on the admission of research students are made by a sub-committee (The Admissions Panel) appointed by the Union College Faculty and comprising the Principal, a Head of Department, and administrative staff.

Where applicants are required to complete an assessment or attend an interview, UTC ensures that any reasonable adjustments which the applicant may require as a result of disability are arranged in advance.

Offer Letter

The offer letter 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 in this CPRDP.

Responsibilities of Students towards the College and their Supervisors

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 the supervisory team.
- (iii) Preparing adequately for meetings with supervisors.
- (iv) Setting and keeping to timetables and deadlines, including planning and submitting work as and when required, and maintaining satisfactory progress with the RDP.
- (v) Maintaining research records in such a way that they can be accessed and understood by anyone with a legitimate need to see them.
- (vi) Raising awareness of any specific needs or circumstances likely to affect their work.
- (vii) Attending any development opportunities (research-related or other) that have been identified when agreeing development needs with supervisors.

The student is responsible for the submitted work, and the eventual success or failure of the RDP. (In signing the Notice of Intention to Submit a Thesis form the principal supervisor and second supervisor do not confirm that the thesis is fit for submission or that the submission will be successful.)

Section 5: Supervision

Appointment of Skilled Supervisors

The Principal is responsible for staff within the College and will normally appoint the supervisory team to a particular student prior to their acceptance of a place on the RDP.

Supervisors are required to ensure they have the appropriate training and skills to perform the task of supervision satisfactorily. Support from experienced supervisors will be given to those new to the role of supervision. All supervisors are expected to engage in developmental opportunities, to equip them to supervise research students, and to meet requirements for continuing professional development.

The Supervisory Team

Supervisory teams are normally appointed and made known to new students by the end of the induction process. The supervisory team normally comprises a principal supervisor and secondary supervisor. A third supervisor may, exceptionally, be appointed where a student's research is interdisciplinary, to provide a link between the disciplines.

The College will consider whether appropriate supervision can be provided and maintained throughout the research period when admitting a student to a RDP. The College principal 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.

Normally the principal supervisor will be the initial point of contact for the student; with the secondary supervisor acting as an alternative contact if the principal supervisor is not available.

The College may appoint external supervisors who are not full-time members of the College Faculty. Such external supervisors may be appointed as either a principal supervisor, second supervisor, or third supervisors. All supervisory teams must have at least one supervisor who is a full-time member of the College Faculty. The Principal will have responsibility for the appointment of external supervisors. All principal and second external supervisors will normally have acted as part of a supervisory team at a HEI before being asked to act in this

capacity and be judged to have the appropriate research and supervisory skills necessary to undertake satisfactorily this responsibility. This will be documented as part of any proposal for the appointment of an external supervisor. An external principal supervisor may be appointed as a senior research fellow or research associate of the College. External supervisors will be expected to report annually to the College Principal on their role as supervisor and to comply with all the requirements for supervision laid out in this Code of Practice.

Responsibilities of the Supervisor

The student is responsible for the eventual success or failure of the RDP. The supervisory team provides the student with advice, help and guidance over the course of the RDP, enabling access to relevant training and development opportunities, to support the completion of the RDP.

At an initial supervisory meeting the supervisor(s) and student agree the roles and responsibilities of the student and each member of the supervisory team; 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. Students and supervisors are jointly responsible for ensuring that regular and frequent contact is maintained.

- (i) Responsibilities are normally shared out amongst members of the supervisory team, however it is normally expected that the principal supervisor has overall responsibility with the second supervisor providing a supporting role.
- (ii) The principal supervisor 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, and health and safety practices.
- (iii) The principal supervisor should 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 him/her as a research student.
- (iv) The supervisory team should agree with the student what training and development requirements need to be fulfilled as part of the requirements for the completion of the RDP.
- (v) The supervisory team should agree an initial research plan with the student, which may be subject to change during the course of the RDP.
- (vi) The supervisory team (and in most cases the principal supervisor) should provide timely and constructive feedback on the student's work and overall progress within the RDP, raising any concerns about progress at an early stage with the student.
- (vii) The supervisory team should ensure that appropriate records are maintained in relation to supervisory meetings, progress monitoring, and Annual Progress Review (including differentiation).
- (viii) The supervisory team should provide appropriate pastoral support as required, by providing advice and/or referring the student to other sources of support, including relevant support services. The principal supervisor normally undertakes the role of personal tutor.
- (ix) The supervisory team should help the student interact with others working in the field of research, for example, encouraging the student to attend relevant seminars and conferences; supporting him/her in seeking funding for such events as required; and where appropriate supporting the submission of

- conference papers and articles to refereed journals.
- (x) The second supervisor may be required to act as the principal supervisor should the principal supervisor be away from the College for a prolonged period of time.

Supervisor Workload

The College principal should ensure that the existing teaching, research and administration commitments of potential supervisors 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.

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

Supervisor support and training

The College principal 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. New supervisors will be mentored by other members of faculty who have already experience in supervising research students through to the completion of their degree. The college will put in place any training that is deemed appropriate to enhance the skills of supervisors. The college will hold each year a staff training seminar devoted to the area of postgraduate supervision.

Section 6: Progress and Review Arrangements

Monitoring and Supporting Student Progress

To support progress within the RDP the College is committed to the following:

- (i) Effective supervision.
- (ii) The development and updating of the research plan.
- (iii) An initial review of the feasibility of the project and the research plan, taking account of the required timeframe for the RDP.
- (iv) Regular progress monitoring, including the requirement for a minimum of six 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.
- (v) Annual Progress Review (including differentiation).

The Annual Progress Review will contain the following three elements:

- (i) A written submission from the student. This could include an updated Research Plan, and a chapter of the thesis or paper for publication, or a statement of progress to date.
- (ii) A meeting with the student, whereby the student can be questioned about his/her work by the Progress Review Panel.
- (iii) A documented outcome of the review and the progression decision.

All returning students registered for RDPs must have their progress reviewed annually by independent progress review panel members, in a meeting at which they are present, in person or via video-conferencing, to discuss their work, prior to registration for the next academic year. The following should provide guidance on good practice to support APR.

Panel Membership

The College shall appoint a Progress Review Panel for each student. This should normally comprise two independent members of staff. One of the independent members should be a senior member of staff within the College.

As it is expected that panel members will not have had substantial co-authoring or

collaborative involvement in the student's work as a result of APR, panel members would be eligible to act as internal examiners at the final oral examination.

One member of the supervisory team, preferably the principal 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 is in attendance at a panel meeting, he/she should be asked to leave the meeting for a few minutes so the student can openly discuss the supervisory process.

Types of Meetings and Student Submissions

Students are admitted as Probationary Research Students ("PRS") and are required to confirm doctoral status at the end of their first year of study. Confirmation of status normally requires the submission of a provisional thesis outline (maximum 1000 words), an annotated bibliography, and a sample of work (typically of around 8,000 words). These submissions will be assessed in an interview with one or more appointed examiners.

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 he / she is able to exercise independent critical judgement?
- Has the student demonstrated that he / she understands how his / her 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 his / her 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)?

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 three academic years for applicants to part-time PhD study.

For full-time students in year two and beyond, APR meetings may comprise a student presentation on their research followed by a question and answer session. Students should normally submit a training record, an updated research plan/completion timetable, and one or more of the following: a progress report, PowerPoint presentation, chapter outline, thesis overview, and thesis chapter(s). The panel may also consider a report from the supervisor(s).

For part-time students, the College may implement the approach outlined above at the end of the second, fourth and sixth years. A lighter touch approach (e.g. reduced student submissions regarding progress, and brief progress review meetings) could be implemented at the end of the first, third, and fifth years.

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

All students who may need to register in the next academic year in order to have a final version of the thesis approved prior to graduation must complete the APR process. For students who are near submission (as acknowledged by the principal supervisor), or who have submitted their thesis but are awaiting a viva, a light touch approach would be appropriate. This is to act as a formal way of 'keeping in touch' in case there may be progress issues, whilst recognising that a full APR at this stage would not be appropriate. These students may benefit from submitting the outline of their thesis and one or more chapters for consideration by the panel.

For students who are completing corrections within a deadline which occurs in the next academic year, a light touch approach would be appropriate. Students who have been asked to revise and resubmit their thesis for re-examination may benefit from submitting draft revised work to the progress review panel, and experiencing a mock viva regarding the corrections. For students who are completing minor corrections or minor revisions, the student submission may simply be a brief report on progress with the corrections, and the expected date of completion and submission of the corrections, and the APR panel meeting could be a very brief meeting to ensure that the student is on track and that there are no issues that would delay the completion.

Any students who are completing minor corrections or minor revisions within a deadline which occurs in the current academic year will not have to complete the APR process. These students would be expected to register in the next academic year in order to graduate only.

Feedback after the APR Meeting

Students should receive written feedback from the progress review panel once the progress recommendation has been approved by the College Faculty. It would be good practice for the supervisory team to receive a copy of this feedback to support the future progression of the student.

Timing of Progress Review Panel Meetings

Registration at the beginning of an academic year shall be dependent on the completion of a satisfactory progress report at the end of the previous academic year, for returning students. The College can determine when in the second semester that APR shall take place for students. Timing may vary depending on the student's year of study/progress, but appropriate information should be disseminated to all students in advance to allow for the required preparations.

For Probationary Research Students who are required to move to Doctoral status, it is recommended that reviews are held within nine months to allow for any remedial actions arising from the review to be completed within the year.

Initial APR meetings will be held early enough to allow students to complete any remedial actions required for progression before they need to register for the next academic year.

Additional Information

Registration at the beginning of an academic year is dependent on the completion of a satisfactory progress report at the end of the previous academic year. Students who are dissatisfied with the outcome of the progress review may appeal to the Principal.

Section 7: Development of Research and Other Skills

Developing the Research, Personal and Professional Skills of Research Students

The College is responsible for ensuring access to a range of personal, professional, and skills development opportunities for research students. Full time research students are expected to undertake 20 days of training and development activity throughout the course of their RDP.

UTC will cover the cost of posting library books to PhD students up to a limit of £50 per annum.

Whilst opportunities for skills development are integrated in the RDPs, the College may provide additional subject-specific training. Students should also be made aware of training opportunities which may be delivered by Research Councils or other Professional Bodies. Subject to available funding and through agreement with the student's supervisor, UTC will encourage students to attend or participate in conferences and seminars which further their research as well as enhancing their professional skills.

Section 8: Evaluation Mechanisms

Collecting and Responding to Evaluations of Research Degree Programme.

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 RDPs.

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 internal examiners are collated and acted upon, by the College Faculty. 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, are 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. This process culminates in the identification of areas of good practice for dissemination across the College.

Section 9: Assessment

Criteria for the Award of a PhD

Students are required to submit a thesis, the length of which should not normally be fewer than 75,000 or greater than 90,000 words. Footnotes are included in this total, the bibliography is not. 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. At least one of these examiners will be external.

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. A detailed understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry.

Roles and Responsibilities

Examiners have an obligation of confidentiality regarding the thesis and the examination. The College appoints the external examiner, the internal examiner and the independent convenor. The College sends the formal appointment letter to the external examiner, along with appropriate regulations and guidance. The external examiner is a specialist in the subject area of the thesis and will take the lead in the examination. The internal examiner is a full examiner, and is expected to have sufficient knowledge and understanding of the topic to enable him/her to judge the quality of the thesis and to play a full part in the examination.

A chair is appointed by the College as an independent convenor of the oral examination panel. The independent convenor is in attendance to monitor the conduct of the examination and provide a report.

The following guidelines outline the role of the independent convenor:

- (i) The convenor 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 convenor 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 convenor 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 convenor offers assistance and facilitation where necessary.
 - (iii) The convenor 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 convenor will decide whether an adjournment is required.
 - (iv) The convenor intervenes if there is a danger of unfairness, bias or unprofessional behaviour.
 - (v) Towards the end of the oral examination, the convenor asks the supervisor to withdraw so that the student has an opportunity to say anything he/she would prefer to say without the presence of the supervisor.
 - (vi) At the end of the oral examination, the convenor asks the student to withdraw while the examiners deliberate.
 - (vii) If the examiners wish to advise the student of their recommendations, the convenor ensures that the student knows that this recommendation is provisional only. The student must await a formal letter from the Principal.
 - (viii) The convenor 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.

The Principal designates a member of staff to make the arrangements for the oral examination, in consultation with the student and the examiners.

Appointment of examiners

The role 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 (on behalf of the Supervisory Team) should approach potential external and internal examiners and Independent Chairs informally with a view to them being nominated to conduct the examination of the thesis. All examiners and Independent Chairs will be appointed by the PTFI.

The appropriate form 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.

It must be ensured that there is an appropriate balance of experience across the examining team. The CV of the potential external examiner must demonstrate previous experience of research degree supervision and/or examination. Should the 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.

The supervisor should not propose internal examiners who have been part of the candidate's supervisory team at any stage. Internal examiners will normally have acted as part of a supervisory team at a HEI before being asked to act in this capacity.

Independent Chairs must normally be permanent members of academic staff of the College with experience of supervision and examining of research degrees and knowledge of the College Regulations and the Code of Practice for Research Degrees. The Independent Chair must not have been involved in the supervision of the candidate. It is not necessary for the

Independent Chair to be a subject expert.

The Preparatory Period Prior to the Viva

The College posts the thesis to the examiners, along with the template examination reports.

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 Principal. The Principal arranges for an investigation under the appropriate College procedure, and informs the examiners of the 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 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 internal examiner contacts the external examiner(s) 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 briefly before the oral examination starts 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.

Communicating the Result to the Student

An oral examination is compulsory for all RDPs, and is normally held in the College. 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.

An agreed Joint Report, signed by all the examiners, is completed after the oral examination, and submitted to the College normally within five working days of the oral examination. 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 independent convenor submits a report covering the procedural conduct of the examination, to the College, normally within five working days of the oral examination.

After considering the Independent Reports, the Report of the Independent Convenor, and the Joint Report, the Principal, or nominee, signs the Joint Report to confirm that the result has been approved. The Principal may refer the case back to the examiners if the Joint Report does not justify the recommendation made.

The College 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 viva examination.

If the examination recommendation includes minor corrections, minor revisions, or revision and resubmission, normally the internal examiner notifies the student in writing of the amendments required, and normally within two weeks of the oral examination. If the examiners have recommended that the thesis be revised and resubmitted for the Doctoral degree, and have also proposed a possible alternative option for the award of a Master's degree subject to minor corrections or minor revisions, the internal examiner should notify the student in writing of the amendments required for each scenario so that the student can decide on the preferred option. The student must confirm the preferred option with the College within ten working days of the date of the examination outcome notification letter.

Following approval of the amendments (for minor corrections or minor revisions), received within the deadline set by the examiners, the internal examiner completes the Completion Report indicating that all amendments have been completed within deadline, and submits it to the Principal. The Principal then notifies the student that the award has been approved.

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 and the decisions of the examiners will lapse. If the student has advised of exceptional circumstances in advance of the deadline, an extension may be granted by the examiners, following approval of the PTFI.

Section 10: Research Student Complaints and Appeals

Complaints and Appeals Procedures

It is in the interests of research students and the College to resolve problems at an early stage.

1. Academic and Teaching Matters

(a) If a research student has a complaint about any matter to do with research or related academic matters, they should first discuss the problem with the supervisor concerned.

(b) If the matter cannot be resolved at that level, a research student should raise the matter with the Principal.

(c) If the student is still not satisfied then they may invoke the grievance procedure that is set-out below.

2. Other Matters

(a) If the complaint is about other matters to do with College life, then a research student should raise the matter in the first instance with their supervisor, who will discuss the matter as appropriate with any other members of College staff who are involved, or who may refer the matter to the Principal. If the research student is not satisfied with the outcome of this initial discussion, they may raise the matter with the Principal.

(b) If the research student is still not satisfied, then they may invoke the formal grievance procedure as detailed below.

3. Harassment

(a) If a research student feels that any other member of the College community has spoken or behaved to them in a manner that is inappropriate or offensive to them, and they do not feel able to take the matter up directly with the person concerned, then a research student should approach the Professor designated by the Faculty to handle such matters. He will attempt to resolve the matter or may refer the matter to someone more appropriate to deal with the matter. He will not, however, divulge any confidential information to anyone else unless he has first obtained the permission of the research student to do so.

(b) If the research student is not satisfied with the outcome, then they may invoke the formal

grievance procedure as detailed below.

2. The Formal Grievance Procedure

(a) If a research student wishes to invoke the formal grievance procedure, they should do so by writing to the Principal, indicating that they wish to invoke the grievance procedure, and giving a summary of the nature of their complaint or grievance.

(b) Within three days, the Principal or other member of the Faculty acting on his behalf will meet with the research student to hear fuller details verbally. At this interview the research student may be accompanied by a fellow student if they so wish. The Principal or his representative may also be accompanied by another member of staff.

(c) The Principal or his representative will then attempt to resolve the matter. He will notify any person who is the subject of the complaint. He may discuss the matter with others involved or with anyone who may be able to help resolve the situation. However, confidential information that the research student has given will not be passed on without their permission.

(d) If the Principal is unable to resolve the situation to the satisfaction of all concerned, then the research student may appeal to the Faculty. They will be invited to a hearing with a panel within seven days of their request. At this hearing they may be accompanied by a fellow student if they so wish.

(e) Any person against whom the research student has made a complaint, or from whom the research student is seeking a redress of grievance, will also be entitled to meet with the panel. Any such third party will also be entitled to be accompanied by a fellow student or staff colleague as appropriate.

(f) The panel will report to the Faculty, which may refer the matter to the College Management Committee if it is likely to involve disciplinary action against a member of staff. The Faculty's decision will be communicated in writing.