

Regulations for research degrees

Introduction

- i. These regulations relate to research programmes of study for students of Birkbeck, University of London (hereafter referred to as 'the University' or 'Birkbeck'). These regulations apply to all such programmes except where exemptions (either to specific regulations or to the regulations as a whole) are approved by the Academic Board of the University.
- ii. This document should be read in conjunction with other relevant published documentation relating to research students including; programme requirement information provided by the School, where appropriate any requirements published by funding bodies and the University's [Code of Practice for Research Students](#).
- iii. These regulations do not apply to any taught programme of study.
- iv. The procedures and information given in any accompanying appendices or footnotes are considered to have the full authority of the regulations contained within the main document. However, appendices or footnotes may be amended or withdrawn as appropriate by the University without reference to Academic Board.
- v. The authority to amend these regulations is held by Academic Board or their nominated group.
- vi. These regulations are applicable to all students within the scope of the regulations until rescinded by the appropriate authority of the University.
- vii. It is the student's responsibility to ensure they have read and understood the regulations. A student's misinterpretation or lack of awareness of these regulations will not be considered a valid reason for non-compliance.

Scope of the Regulations

- viii. These regulations apply to the following degrees and to students registered at Birkbeck for these degrees:

Level 7: Master of Philosophy (MPhil)

Level 8: Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

- ix. The University also award the following specialist doctorates where separate additional regulations may apply.

Level 7: Master of Philosophical Studies (MPhilStud)

Level 8: Doctor of Psychology (D-Psychotherapy)

Level 8: Doctor in Occupational Health Psychology (DrOHP)

Level 8: Doctor in Occupational Psychology (DOccPsy)

Level 8: Doctor in Evidence-Based Human Resource Management (DrEBHRM)

Application of the Regulations

- x. These regulations will apply to research students who started their studies at Birkbeck on or after 1 October 2017.

Academic Year

- xi. Dates of the academic year are specified by the Academic Board of the University. The academic year will normally start in October. The word “year” when used without limitations means calendar year.

Definition of Terms

- xii. The following list defines some of the terms used throughout this document:

Admission: the acceptance of a student onto a programme of study.

Award: a named qualification made by the University, in line with the QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.

Enrolment: the annual procedure by which students confirm intent to continue study and make arrangements for the payment of fees for that academic year.

Examination: the final stage of the research degree, where the candidate is tested on their knowledge and achievement. This normally consists of a written submission (the thesis) and an oral examination (the viva).

Independent Chair: A member of academic staff appointed to oversee the viva examination.

Interruption of Studies: a period of approved absence by the student from the programme of study.

Registration: the act of confirming that the student has met the conditions of admission and commenced a programme of study. Registration occurs once at the beginning of a relevant programme of study.

Research Strategy Group (RSG): The University Committee responsible for research student matters, or any successor committee, however so named, that assumes its functions. Matters discussed at RSG are reported to Research Committee.

Research Student: research students are students studying a research degree which results in one of the Level 7 or Level 8 awards listed above (normally for the award of MPhil or PhD) at the University, to whom the University's research degree regulations apply.

University: Reference to "the University" should be taken to refer to Birkbeck, University of London.

Upgrade: an assessment of the research student's progress on the degree. Successful completion of the upgrade will normally lead to the student's transfer from the MPhil degree to the PhD degree.

Writing Up: a mode of registration which may occur at the end of the degree programme, where students are expected to be writing up the findings of their research and to need a lower level of supervision.

PART ONE: GENERAL REGULATIONS

1. Admission and Registration of Students onto Research Programmes

- 1.1. In order to be considered for an award of the University, students must be admitted by the University and must register and enrol for a programme of study offered by the University.
- 1.2. All decisions on admission will be taken in accordance with the University's [Admissions Policy](#).
- 1.3. All research students will normally be enrolled on an MPhil programme in the first instance.

- 1.4. A student may not normally register concurrently for more than one degree, diploma or certificate or any combination of these awards of the University of London.
- 1.5. A student may not normally register as a student of the University while registered as a student for the equivalent qualification of any other university or institution.

2. Period of Student Registration

- 2.1. The minimum period of registration with the University for any research student will not normally be less than 2 years of full-time study (or 3 years of part-time study).
- 2.2. If a student has been accepted under the provisions of the [Admissions Policy](#) for exemption of part of the programme of study, the minimum period of registration is 1 year of full-time study (or 2 years of part-time study).

3. Maximum Period of Registration

- 3.1. Unless otherwise mandated by a specific external funder, the maximum period of registration for a research degree is 4 years of full-time study (or 7 years of part-time study), excluding any approved interruptions of studies. The maximum period of registration includes time in writing up status.
- 3.2. If a student exceeds the maximum period of registration their enrolment on the programme they will normally be terminated on the grounds of failure of academic progress, under the provisions of the University's [Policy and Procedure for Discontinuation of Registration on a Programme of Study](#). Any decision to terminate a student's registration on the programme shall be made with the agreement of the PGR School Lead.
- 3.3. Maximum registration period extensions are not an entitlement and are only granted in exceptional circumstances as a Suspension of Regulations. When students are sponsored by a specific external funder, any University registration extension would not alter funder submission deadlines or funding end dates (see paragraph 3.9).
- 3.4. Research students whose circumstances have significantly constrained their ability to submit within the maximum registration period may apply for an extension.
- 3.5. Any request to exceed the maximum registration period must be made using the current process for consideration of such requests, managed by the Birkbeck Graduate Research School (BGRS). Proposals for extensions may only be made in advance.
- 3.6. An extension to the maximum registration period will not be granted if there is evidence that changes to enrolment including breaks in studies, or mode of study

changes were not requested at the appropriate time.

- 3.7. Proposals for extension beyond the maximum period of registration must be supported by the supervisor and PGR School Lead and will be considered by the Research Strategy Group (RSG) on a case by case basis. Extensions are not automatically approved and a case must be made for the delay in submission, along with a schedule for completion within any agreed extension period.
- 3.8. It is essential that the schedule of work for the extended period is considered and accurate: an extension to the maximum registration period may only be offered on one occasion.
- 3.9. Where a student is in receipt of funding from an external source (e.g. a UKRI studentship or an employer), and the terms and conditions of that external funder require submission of the thesis before the maximum registration period specified in 3.1 is reached, the student must abide by the thesis submission deadline specified by their funder.

4. Interruption of Studies

- 4.1. Students may interrupt their studies with a 'Break in Study' status, in accordance with the University's [Interruptions Policy](#).
- 4.2. Students who do not re-enrol by the end of the maximum period allowed in the [Interruptions Policy](#) will be considered to have withdrawn from the programme of study, and their registration will be discontinued.

5. Enrolment

- 5.1. All students must enrol at the start of their first year of the programme, and at the start of each subsequent academic year for the duration of their registration on the programme (not including any period covered by an approved break in study). All students must abide by the enrolment procedure published by the University and must enrol to the satisfaction of the University.
- 5.2. Students who fail to complete enrolment for each academic year of their programme will be considered to have withdrawn, and their registration will be terminated.
- 5.3. Each student's academic progress will be reviewed annually and a decision will be made, in consultation with the appropriate PGR School Lead or delegated body, as to whether admission to the next year of the programme of study will be offered or not.¹¹

¹ See also the University's [Policy on Discontinuation of Registration](#)

- 5.4. Any decision to discontinue a student's registration on the programme shall be made by the PGR School Lead under the provisions of the University's [Policy and Procedure for Discontinuation of Registration](#).

6. Upgrade from MPhil to PhD

- 6.1. All students transferring from MPhil to PhD status must complete an upgrade examination to evidence their academic progress.
- 6.2. Upgrades are carried out in accordance with the University's [MPhil/ PhD upgrade expectations](#).
- 6.3. Students have a maximum of two attempts to pass the upgrade. If a student does not pass the upgrade at the second attempt, they may be offered the opportunity to complete the MPhil degree, at the discretion of the School.

7. Writing Up Status

- 7.1. In accordance with the University's [Policy on Writing Up](#), a student may be entitled to register with 'Writing Up' status and be liable for the reduced tuition fee. Such students are required to submit their thesis within one calendar year (full-time) or two calendar years (part-time).
- 7.2. Recommendation for 'Writing Up' status is at the discretion of the supervisor(s) and is considered by the PGR School Lead.
- 7.3. The maximum period of registration specified in 3.1 includes time spent in writing up status which is an enrolled status.
- 7.4. The candidate's PGR School Lead may ask the Head of RIKE to approve that 'Writing Up' status is extended if there is evidence that circumstances have significantly constrained their ability to submit, provided that the maximum registration period is not exceeded. If extension to writing up mode is not approved the student will revert to full fees.

8. Withdrawal from a Programme of Study

- 8.1. A student who withdraws from a programme of study at the University ceases immediately to be a registered student at the University.

PART TWO: REQUIREMENTS OF A THESIS

9. Requirements for both MPhil (Level 7) and Doctoral (Level 8) theses

- 9.1. The thesis must consist of the candidate's own account of their investigations, the greater proportion of which must have been undertaken during the period of registration under supervision for the degree.
- 9.2. The thesis must be an integrated whole and present a coherent argument.
- 9.3. The thesis must be written in English and the literary presentation must be, in the judgement of the examiners, satisfactory.²

10. Requirements for MPhil thesis only

- 10.1. In addition to the requirements listed in 9.0 above, the MPhil thesis must be either an ordered and critical exposition of existing knowledge or a record of original work and must provide evidence that the field has been surveyed thoroughly.

11. Requirements for PhD thesis only

- 11.1. In addition to the requirements listed in 9.0 above, the PhD thesis must:
 - 11.1.1. Indicate how the candidate's investigations appear to the candidate to advance the study of the subject.
 - 11.1.2. Form a distinct contribution to the knowledge of the subject and afford evidence of originality by the discovery of new facts and/or by the exercise of independent critical power.
 - 11.1.3. Give a critical assessment of the relevant literature, describe the method of research and its findings, and include a discussion of those findings, and indicate in what respects they appear to the candidate to advance our understanding of the subject.
 - 11.1.4. Demonstrate a deep and synoptic understanding of the field of study, (the candidate being able to place the thesis in a wider context), objectivity and the capacity for judgement in complex situations and autonomous work in that field.
 - 11.1.5. Be of a standard to merit publication in whole or in part or in a revised form (for example as a monograph or as a number of articles in learned journals).

² The University may permit on an exceptional basis only a thesis in the field of modern foreign languages and literatures only to be written in the language of study. In such cases the thesis must include additionally a submission of between 10,000 and 20,000 words which must be written in English and must summarise the main arguments of the thesis.

12. Word Count

- 12.1. The maximum word count for research degree theses is 60,000 for MPhil and 100,000 for PhD and professional doctorates.

PART THREE: ASSESSMENT

13. Requirements for entry of MPhil or PhD examination

- 13.1. The greater proportion of the work submitted in a thesis must have been done after the initial registration for a research degree, except if a candidate has been admitted to the programme with exemption of part of the programme of study.
- 13.2. A candidate will not be permitted to submit as their thesis one which has been submitted for a degree or comparable award of this or any other University or institution unless a formal agreement is in place: for example, in the case of a formally agreed Dual Award.
- 13.3. A candidate may submit the results of work done in conjunction with their supervisor(s) and/or with fellow research workers provided that the candidate states clearly their own personal share in the investigation and that the statement is certified by the supervisor(s). The decision to submit a thesis in any particular form rests with the candidate alone.
- 13.4. Additionally, a candidate must provide a digital copy of the thesis to the University for submission to plagiarism detection software.³³
- 13.5. A candidate must submit appropriate forms and information when entering their thesis for examination, as stipulated by the Birkbeck Graduate Research School (BGRS). Candidates should ensure they are aware of the requirements and deadlines for submission.
- 13.6. A candidate must be fully enrolled at the point of their formal thesis submission.

14. Examination of MPhil or PhD degree

- 14.1. Examiners will be appointed for each candidate in accordance with the procedures adopted for the appointment of examiners by the University. At least one examiner for each candidate must have experience as an examiner for a research degree awarded by a British higher education institution. The outcome of the examination is

³ See also section 19: Research Misconduct

determined by two or more examiners acting jointly.

- 14.2. The BGRS will distribute the formally submitted thesis to the examiners. Only the version of the thesis provided by the BGRS to the examiners may be considered by the examiners for examination.
- 14.3. The examiners, after reading the thesis, must examine the candidate orally, and at their discretion by written papers or practical examination, or by both methods on the subject of the thesis and, if they see fit, on other relevant subjects.
- 14.4. The examiners will prepare and exchange independent preliminary written reports prior to the examination of the thesis to assist in conducting the oral examination. Copies of the preliminary reports must be provided to the BGRS before a viva can proceed.
- 14.5. After any oral examination, a joint final report must be prepared and submitted to the Birkbeck Graduate Research School.
- 14.6. The preliminary and joint reports will be made available to the candidate along with the outcome of the examination.
- 14.7. The supervisor(s) may be invited to attend the oral examination of their MPhil or PhD candidate as an observer, if the candidate requests this. The supervisor(s) does not have the right to participate in the examination of the candidate but may contribute if invited to do so by the examiners. Otherwise the oral examination will be held in private.
- 14.8. Candidates and supervisors have the option to request that the examination is overseen by an independent chair.
- 14.9. The examiners may, at their discretion, consult the Independent Chair (if present), or the BGRS before completing their report, particularly if they have doubts relating to the appropriate decision to be made.
- 14.10. Where examiners cannot agree on an outcome the University's [Policy For Extraordinary Research Degree Examination Outcomes](#) will be followed.

15. Outcome of the Examination for PhD

- 15.1. After the oral examination, the examiners must decide on one of the following outcomes:
 - 15.1.1. **Pass without amendments** or limited to minor typographical changes that can be completed within *1 week*.
 - 15.1.2. **Conditional pass with minor amendments**, to be made within a

maximum of *6 months* from receipt of examination reports.

15.1.2.1. May only be offered on one occasion per candidate: A candidate who is required to complete minor amendments cannot subsequently be offered major amendments; only one conditional pass with examiner-mandated amendments is permitted per research degree examination.

15.1.3. **Conditional pass with major amendments**, to be made within a maximum of *12 months* from receipt of examination reports.

15.1.3.1. Major amendments require more time than minor amendments but would not be expected to substantially change the core intellectual arguments of the thesis.

15.1.3.2. May only be offered on one occasion per candidate: A candidate who is required to complete major amendments cannot subsequently be offered minor amendments; only one conditional pass with examiner-mandated amendments is permitted per research degree examination.

15.1.4. **Resubmission for examination**: within 18 months of receipt of examination reports for resubmission of a doctoral degree; within 12 months of receipt of examination reports if the candidate is being allowed to resubmit for an MPhil degree.

15.1.4.1. The resubmission outcome may be used if the view of the examiners is that the case for awarding a doctoral degree has not been established, but the examiners see potential for the candidate to reach the required standard with substantial further work and re-examination.

15.1.4.2. This may only be offered on one occasion per candidate.

15.1.4.3. Examiners will decide on the need for a second oral examination after reviewing the revised thesis.

15.1.4.4. Following resubmission, one opportunity can be provided to make further changes as minor amendments as specified in 15.1.2. Upon resubmission, the candidate must have responded sufficiently to the initial reports so that no more than 6 months is required for any further corrections. For this reason, an outcome of major amendments would only be available after resubmission in accordance with the University's [Policy For Extraordinary Research Degree Examination Outcomes](#).

15.1.5. **Offer of MPhil; or offer of MPhil** after *6 months'* minor amendments.

15.1.6. **Fail without option of resubmission**

- 15.1.6.1. Before recommending this option, the examiners must be able to offer a robust and full explanation, detailing why none of the other outcomes were appropriate. All examiner reports will be made available to the candidate.
- 15.2. If a candidate is asked by the examiners to make amendments to their thesis under 15.1.2 or 15.1.3, 15.1.4, or 15.1.5 it is the candidate's responsibility to resubmit the amended thesis by the deadline stipulated in these regulations.
- 15.2.1. **Failure to submit a revised thesis by the required deadline for a conditional pass:** If the candidate fails to meet the deadline they will be withdrawn from the degree and their research degree award will not be conferred unless RSG accepts evidence that circumstances have significantly constrained their ability to resubmit and the examiners agree to consider work beyond the original deadline that will be set in accordance with the [Policy For Extraordinary Research Degree Examination Outcomes](#).
- 15.2.2. **Failure to satisfy the requirements made by examiners for a conditional pass:** When an outcome of conditional pass is agreed, with either minor or major amendments, the examiners should have full confidence that the thesis is fundamentally of doctoral standard (i.e. the work will merit award of a doctoral degree once revised) and that the candidate is capable of completing the required changes. However, if upon submission of the revised thesis the examiners are not satisfied that their specified requirements have been met, they must report this outcome. In order for the examination to progress the University will follow its [Policy For Extraordinary Research Degree Examination Outcomes](#).
- 15.3. The examiners considering minor amendments or major revisions shall be the same examiners as those who examined the original submission, unless these examiners are unavailable. In such cases new examiner(s) will be appointed through the standard procedure for nominating examiners.

16. Outcome of the Examination for MPhil

- 16.1. After the oral examination, the examiners must decide on one of the following outcomes:
- 16.1.1. **Pass without amendments** or limited to typographical changes that can be completed within 1 week.
- 16.1.2. **Conditional pass with minor amendments**, to be made within a maximum of 3 months from receipt of examination reports.

- 16.1.2.1. May only be offered on one occasion per candidate: A candidate who is required to complete minor amendments cannot subsequently be offered major amendments; only one round of examiner-mandated amendments is permitted per research degree examination.
- 16.1.3. **Conditional pass with major amendments**, to be made within a maximum of *6 months* from receipt of examination reports.
- 16.1.3.1. Major amendments require more time than minor amendments but would not be expected to substantially change the core intellectual arguments of the thesis.
- 16.1.3.2. This may only be offered on one occasion per candidate: A candidate who is required to complete major amendments cannot subsequently be offered minor amendments; only one round of examiner-mandated amendments is permitted per research degree examination.
- 16.1.4. **Resubmission for MPhil examination**, within *9 months* of receipt of examination reports.
- 16.1.4.1. The resubmission outcome may be used if the view of the examiners is that the case for awarding a doctoral degree has not been established but the examiners see potential for the candidate to reach the required standard with substantial further work and re-examination.
- 16.1.4.2. This may only be offered on one occasion per candidate.
- 16.1.4.3. Examiners will not decide on the need for a second oral examination before reviewing the revised thesis.
- 16.1.4.4. Following resubmission, one opportunity can be provided to make further changes as minor amendments as specified in 16.1.2. Upon resubmission, the candidate must have responded sufficiently to the initial reports so that no more than *three months* is required for any further corrections. For this reason, an option of major amendments would only be available after resubmission in accordance with the [Policy For Extraordinary Research Degree Examination Outcomes](#).
- 16.1.5. **Fail without the option of Resubmission**
- 16.1.5.1. Before recommending this option, the examiners must be able to offer a robust and full explanation, detailing why none of the other outcomes were appropriate. Examiner reports will be available to the candidate.

16.2. If a candidate is asked by the examiners to make amendments to their thesis under 16.1.2 or 16.1.3, or 16.4, it is the candidate's responsibility to resubmit the amended thesis by the deadline stipulated in these regulations.

16.2.1. **Failure to submit a revised thesis by the required deadline for a conditional pass:** If the candidate fails to meet the deadline they will be withdrawn from the degree and their research degree award will not be conferred unless RSG accepts evidence that circumstances have significantly constrained their ability to resubmit and the examiners agree to consider work beyond the original deadline that will be set in accordance with the [Policy For Extraordinary Research Degree Examination Outcomes](#).

16.2.2. **Failure to satisfy the requirements made by examiners for a conditional pass:** When an outcome of conditional pass is agreed, with either minor or major amendments, the examiners should have full confidence that the candidate will satisfy the requirements of an MPhil in their revisions. If, upon submission of the revised thesis the examiners are not satisfied that their specified requirements have been met, they must report this outcome. In order for the examination to progress the [Policy For Extraordinary Research Degree Examination Outcomes](#) will be followed.

16.3. The examiners considering minor amendments or major revisions shall be the same examiners as those who examined the original submission, unless these examiners are unavailable. In such cases, new examiner(s) will be appointed through the standard procedure for nominating examiners.

17. Conferment of Award

17.1. When a candidate has satisfied the examiners in the oral examination, they must submit one digital copy of their thesis to the Birkbeck Library⁴. Students may submit one hard bound copy if they wish but this is not a requirement for the award.

17.2. Once a copy is received by the University, the candidate's award will be put forward for approval by Academic Board or delegated authority.

17.3. Once approved, candidates will receive formal notification of their award from the University.

17.4. The diploma for the degree will bear the name of the candidate in the form in which

⁴ A candidate may apply to the University for an embargo for restriction of access, for a period not normally exceeding two years, to the thesis and/or the abstract of the thesis on the grounds of commercial exploitation or patenting or in very exceptional circumstances and in accordance with the procedure adopted by the University for consideration of such applications.

they appear in the records of the University at the date of issue.

18. Appeals

18.1. Research students may submit a formal appeal against the outcome of their final examination; against the outcome of their upgrade examination; and against any decision by a PGR School Lead to discontinue their registration via the process outlined under regulation 5.3.

18.2. Any appeal will be considered in line with the University's Appeals Policy and Procedure (Research).

19. Research Misconduct

19.1. If at any point during the examination process, allegations are raised of research misconduct, including, but not limited to research ethics, plagiarism and fabrication of data, the matter will be referred to the University's Procedure for reporting and investigating research misconduct; or the University's [Assessment Offences Policy](#), as appropriate.

19.2. The examination process will be suspended until any such investigation is completed.

Academic Board
June 2017

Academic Board
September 2022
Minor amendments

Academic Board
June 2025
Minor amendments

Academic Board
July 2026
Minor amendments