



Postgraduate Research Code of Practice

Appendix 17

Framework for Professional Doctorates

- A. This is the academic Framework for Professional Doctorate programmes. All Professional Doctorate programmes should conform to this framework with the exception of the following programmes which were in place prior to introduction of this framework:
- Executive Doctor of Business Administration
 - Doctor of Clinical Psychology
 - Doctor of Dental Science
 - Online Professional Doctorates (EdD, DBA) delivered in partnership with Kaplan Open Learning
- B. Professional doctorates provide an opportunity for individuals to situate professional knowledge developed over time in a theoretical academic framework¹. Professional Doctorates are available on a part-time basis based on the expectation that candidates will carry out their studies whilst they are engaged in relevant employment which informs their studies.
- C. The thesis stage of the Professional Doctorate programmes is subject to the provisions of the University of Liverpool's [PGR Code of Practice](#). Where there are differences, the provisions of this Framework take precedence over those of the PGR Code of Practice.
- D. The Pre-Thesis Stage of the Professional Doctorate programmes is subject to the provisions of the University of Liverpool's [Code of Practice on Assessment](#). Where there are differences, the provisions of this Framework take precedence over those of the Code of Practice on Assessment.

1. Programme Definition and Structure

- a) Professional Doctorates are research programmes leading to a Doctoral award. Each programme should meet the definition of research set out in the [PGR Code of Practice](#).
- b) A Professional Doctorate programme should include an exit award at level 7 which should be consistent with the requirements for taught Master's degrees set out in [Appendix C of the Code of Practice on Assessment \(Framework for Full-time and Part-time Modular Postgraduate Programmes\)](#). Where the exit award is named, this should be detailed in the relevant Programme Specification.
- c) All Professional Doctorate programmes should be modularised and the Doctoral award should comprise 540 credits of which 360 credits must be FHEQ level 8² and 180 credits of the programme must be at FHEQ level 7. The taught Master's exit award should comprise 180 credits at level 7 (e.g.: MA, MSc, MRes or other level 7 Masters degrees).
- d) All modules in the pre-thesis stage should be credit-rated and assigned a single level no lower than level 7. Credit values for all modules in the programme should be assigned on the basis that 10 hours of student commitment should be allocated one credit point.
- e) The thesis should be worth 360 credits at level 8. A written thesis will contain no more than 60,000 words, unless permission is granted by the relevant School/ Institute Director of PGR for a thesis to be longer for sound academic reasons.
- f) A description of how credit is delivered and assessed should be provided in module specifications. Credit may be awarded for work/practice-based learning, as specified in the relevant programme specification.

¹ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/doctoral-degree-characteristics-statement-2020.pdf>

² Credit is awarded at level 8 for original research.

- g) Students who do not make satisfactory progress for continuation on the doctoral programme may be considered for a level 7 exit qualification providing they satisfy the requirements of the Master’s degree set out in this Framework and [Appendix C of the Code of Practice on Assessment \(Framework for Full-time and Part-time Modular Postgraduate Programmes\)](#). Formal certification for this taught exit award will be provided to the student alongside a transcript showing credits taken.
- h) Students may be permitted to enter the pre-thesis stage of the programme with recognition of prior learning (RPL) assessed on a case by case basis by the relevant designated RPL Assessor, in accordance with the [University’s RPL Policy](#).
- i) Each Professional Doctorate programme must have a process to review and approve research proposals, composition of supervisory teams and to ensure that projects obtain appropriate research ethics approval before the student progresses to the thesis stage, in accordance with University of Liverpool procedures.
- j) Students may not attempt more than 540 credits throughout the pre-thesis and thesis stages of the programme.

2. Periods of Registration

Registration periods

A Professional Doctorate programme is designed to be studied on a part-time basis with the following periods of time allowed for completion of the pre-thesis and thesis stages:

	Normal period of registration	Maximum period of registration (including interruption of study and re-submission)
Pre-thesis	2 years	3 years
Thesis	2.5 years	5.5 years
Total	4.5 years	8.5 years

Maximum period allowed for registration

- a) The maximum total period for a student’s registration on a Professional Doctorate programme is 8.5 years. This *includes* the pre-thesis stage and the thesis stage, in addition to the maximum available periods of interruption during the pre-thesis and thesis stages and re-submission occurring during the thesis stage.
- b) Registration periods associated with the pre-thesis and thesis stages are managed separately and each allocation does not influence the other. Students are not permitted to carry over ‘unused’ registration time from the pre-thesis stage to the thesis stage, nor build a time deficit in the pre-thesis stage which will be ‘settled’ in the thesis stage.
- c) Submission of the doctoral thesis is required no less than 1.5 years following commencement of the thesis stage. It is normally expected that submission of the thesis will occur after 2.5 years.

3. Supervision of the thesis (thesis stage)

- a) Each research student shall have a supervisory team containing a main (primary) supervisor who is the clearly identified point of contact for the student.

- b) Each member of the supervisory team should meet the usual University of Liverpool requirements for appointment as a research supervisor.
- c) At least one member of the student's supervisory team must be a member of academic or academic-related staff employed by the University of Liverpool.
- d) Members of the student's supervisory team who are not academic staff employed by the University of Liverpool will be appointed as a 'recognised supervisor' in accordance with [Appendix 2 of the PGR Code of Practice: Policy on Research Student Supervision](#).
- e) For each Professional Doctorate programme students will normally be assigned to research groups and will be expected to engage with their research community, supported by the supervisory team.
- f) All other arrangements for the supervision of the doctoral thesis will be made in accordance with [Appendix 2 of the PGR Code of Practice: Policy on Research Student Supervision](#).

4. Assessment and Examination Processes

Pre-thesis stage

- a) Students' academic progress during the pre-thesis phase of Professional Doctorate programmes will be monitored by the relevant Board of Examiners in accordance with section 13 of the University's [Code of Practice on Assessment](#).
- b) All Professional Doctorate programmes should constitute a Board of Examiners to approve recommendations by Examiners of outcomes of assessment of all modules except for the doctoral thesis, which will be examined by *viva* examination.
- c) The Board of Examiners must also determine whether or not a student has made satisfactory progress during the pre-thesis stage and may terminate the studies of those students whose academic progress is unsatisfactory, in accordance with the procedure established by the University of Liverpool.
- d) All modules in the pre-thesis stage will be assessed in accordance with the mark scheme as set out in the module specifications. Marks of 50% or greater will constitute a pass and those of less than 50% a fail.
- e) Students may re-take failed taught modules on one occasion only, in accordance with the relevant module and programme specifications and [Appendix C of the Code of Practice on Assessment \(Framework for Full-time and Part-time Modular Postgraduate Programmes\)](#).
- f) Progression to the thesis stage is dependent on successful completion of 180 credits at level 7 with an overall module average of at least 60% in the pre-thesis stage of the programme. In circumstances where a candidate passes the pre-thesis stage but fails to achieve a minimum overall module average of 60%, they will be ineligible to proceed to the thesis stage and will be considered by the appropriate Board of Examiners for a taught Master's exit award (as set out in [Appendix C of the Code of Practice on Assessment \(Framework for Full-time and Part-time Modular Postgraduate Programmes\)](#)).
- g) No student may proceed to the thesis stage of the programme carrying any failed modules. Module marks achieved through re-assessment will be capped at 50% when recorded on the student's transcript and for the purposes of determining whether the threshold for progression has been met.

- h) Appeals against module marks (not including the thesis) should be made in accordance with the University's [Code of Practice on Assessment, Appendix F, Assessment Appeals Procedure for Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Programmes](#).
- i) Appeals against the decision of the Board of Examiners to terminate studies should be made and considered in accordance with the University's [Code of Practice on Assessment, Appendix E, Guide on the Progress of Students on Taught Programmes of Study](#).
- j) Double counting of prior learning for credit must be avoided. Credit, whether gained at this or another institution, can only be accumulated towards one single award at any given level. For example, the credit transfer (through RPCL) of a PG Certificate or PG Diploma with a view towards completing a Master's degree, would be accepted only where those credits had not already been counted towards another degree.
- k) Suspected academic misconduct will be managed in line with the University's Academic Integrity Policy ([Appendix L of the Code of Practice on Assessment](#)) for the pre-thesis stage, and in line with the University's PGR Academic Integrity Policy ([Appendix 4 of the PGR Code of Practice](#)) for the thesis stage.

Thesis stage

- l) Students' academic progress during the thesis stage of the programme will be handled in accordance with [Appendix 3 of the PGR Code of Practice: Policy and Procedures on the Academic Progress of Postgraduate Research Students](#).
- m) If a student is to be withdrawn due to unsatisfactory progress the student will be considered by the relevant Board of Examiners to determine their eligibility for an exit award based on their work in the pre-thesis stage.
- n) Students are permitted to interrupt their studies during the thesis stage for up to 18 months in total, due to extenuating circumstances in line with [Appendix 6 of the PGR Code of Practice: Policy on Interruptions of Study, on Extensions of Study and on Extenuating Circumstances in Relation to the Viva Voce Examination](#).
- o) The submission of the thesis will be in accordance with the procedure outlined in [Appendix 7 of the PGR Code of Practice: Policy on Submission of Research Degree Thesis for examination](#).
- p) The *viva voce* will be conducted in line with [Appendix 8 of the PGR Code of Practice: Policy on Research Degree Examinations and Examiners](#).

5. Viva examination (thesis stage):

- a) The outcome of the thesis stage of the programme is determined by the Examiners in the *viva* examination.

Following the *viva* examination, the Examiners may recommend:

- i. that the degree of Professional Doctorate be conferred;
- ii. that the degree of Professional Doctorate be conferred subject to the candidate making **minor** modifications to the thesis within three months of the formal notification of the outcome of their *viva voce* by the University, which do not alter the substance of the thesis in any significant or fundamental manner, to the satisfaction of one or more of the Examiners, as may be agreed between them;

- iii. that the degree of Professional Doctorate be conferred subject to the candidate making **major** modifications to the thesis within six months of the formal notification of the outcome of their *viva voce* by the University. Whilst the Examiners agree that the submission is generally of the standard required for the award sought, some re-structuring of the thesis and/ or clarification of arguments is required in order to merit the award. The required amendments must not materially alter the conclusions of the thesis **nor** stipulate that the candidate undertake additional research beyond the scope of the original thesis. Modifications must be carried out to the satisfaction of all of the Examiners and a second *viva voce* examination will not be held;
- iv. that the thesis does not currently meet the standard required for the award sought, however, it has the potential to do so following a period of significant revision and re-working, which might include re-conceptualisation of arguments, amendment to the conclusions and/ or additional research beyond the scope of the original thesis. The candidate is permitted to make a subsequent application for the degree of Professional Doctorate on one occasion only, provided that the application is made no later than one calendar year from the date of the formal notification of the outcome of their *viva voce* by the University. A thesis may only be re-presented for the award of Professional Doctorate as a result of a recommendation made in accordance with this provision, and shall be revised having due regard for the Examiners' observations. A second *viva voce* examination must be held;
- v. that the degree of Master of Philosophy be conferred upon the candidate, subject to minor modifications being made to the thesis, if required, within three months of the formal notification of the outcome of their *viva voce* by the University, to the satisfaction of one or more of the Examiners, as may be agreed between them;
- vi. that the degree of MPhil be conferred subject to the candidate making major modifications to the thesis within six months of the formal notification of the outcome of their *viva voce* by the University. Whilst the Examiners agree that the submission is generally of the standard required for an MPhil award, some re-structuring of the thesis and/ or clarification of arguments is required in conclusions of the thesis nor stipulate that the candidate undertake additional research beyond the scope of the original thesis. Modifications must be carried out to the satisfaction of all of the Examiners and a second *viva voce* examination will not be held;
- vii. that the thesis has not met the required doctoral standard and that the degree of taught Masters is recommended based upon the student's work at the pre-thesis stage. The student's eligibility for a taught Master's level exit award will be determined by the appropriate Board of Examiners;
- viii. that the candidate be deemed not to have attained the standard required for the Professional Doctorate or MPhil degree and that no further opportunity for examination be allowed. This decision would be made only where the Examiners have determined that the student has engaged in academic misconduct to such an extent as to render the student ineligible for the degree of Professional Doctorate/ MPhil. Suspected cases of academic misconduct should be handled in accordance with Appendix 4 of the PGR Code of Practice: PGR Academic Integrity Policy. The student's eligibility for a taught Master's level exit award as set out in [Appendix C of the Code of Practice on Assessment \(Framework for Full-time and Part-time Modular Postgraduate Programmes\)](#), will be determined based on their work at the pre-thesis stage and will be referred back to the appropriate Board of Examiners for consideration. Should a student be found to have contravened the PGR Academic Integrity Policy (<https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/aqsd/academic-codes-of->

practice/pgr-code-of-practice/) during the thesis stage, but there is no evidence of academic misconduct during the pre-thesis stage, the student will still be eligible to be considered by the appropriate Board of Examiners for a taught Master's exit award.

Following the re-examination of a thesis for the award of Professional Doctorate, the Examiners are permitted to recommend only outcomes (i) (ii) (v) (vii) or (viii) as listed above. Candidates will not be allowed a further period of re-submission.

- b) Following the *viva* examination, students may appeal against the decision of the Examiners in accordance with [Appendix 10 of the PGR Code of Practice: Research Degree Appeals Procedures](#).
- c) Programme certification refers only to the highest exit award achieved by the candidate. Candidates will not receive separate certification for interim awards associated with the programme in addition to their exit award.