

14B POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH DEGREE REGULATIONS

Introduction

- 14b.1 All postgraduate research degree (PGR) students are bound by, and must satisfy, the following regulations and are advised to read them in conjunction with the university's PGR Code of Practice for Students and Supervisors (PGR Code of Practice) and other relevant university policies. Aligned with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, the PGR Code of Practice sets the context for implementation of the regulations and provides detailed guidance and practical support in relation to the responsibilities of research students, supervisors and academic partners.
- 14b.2 The Research Degrees Committee (RDC) is empowered by Academic Council to recommend the award of research degrees on behalf of the university Court.

Research awards

- 14b.3 The university has adopted the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) as the basis for the development and design of its postgraduate research degree programmes. Postgraduate research awards offered relate explicitly to SCQF Levels 11 and 12 and the generic learning outcomes that will apply are those set out in the SCQF level descriptors .
- 14b.4 The university offers the following research awards:

Degree	Description
Higher Doctorate (DLitt, DSc, DD, DTech, DEng, DEd, DSocSc, DArts)	See Section 14c – awarded to current or former staff only
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)	Based on a supervised research project during which the student is registered at a higher education institution. All doctoral students are required to make an original contribution to knowledge by conducting an independent research project.
PhD by Prior Publication or Portfolio	See Section 14d - A doctoral award may be achieved through prior publication or portfolio, comprising a coherent body of outputs accompanied by a critical commentary. Candidates must demonstrate an original contribution to knowledge, coherence, and rigour equivalent to those of a traditional supervised research doctorate.
Professional Doctorate (DLitt, DSc, DD, DTech, DEng, DEd, DSocSc, DArts)	Based on a supervised research project in the student's profession, rooted in an academic discipline.

Academic Standards and Quality Regulations 2026-27
Postgraduate regulations

Degree	Description
Masters by Research (normally MRes)	Based on independent research, undertaken with supervision and guidance, for a shorter period of time than a doctoral degree. MRes degree may include up to 60 credit points through taught components.

Table 1: Research awards offered by the university

- 14b.5 The university may enter into joint award arrangements with other institutions, subject to its policies, procedures and regulations on collaborative provision.

Admission

- 14b.6 The standard entry requirements are:
- a postgraduate Masters degree from a degree awarding body recognised by the UK government, or equivalent, or
 - a first or upper second class honours degree from a degree awarding body recognised by the UK government, or equivalent, or
 - other qualifications or experience that affords sufficient evidence of an applicant's ability to work at the academic level associated with the target award.
- 14b.7 Applications will be considered by RDC which has delegated authority from Academic Council to approve or reject applications. If approved, RDC will also:
- approve the proposed thesis topic
 - approve a suitable supervisory team, and
 - ensure that the principal or director of the academic partner or research area (or nominated representative) undertakes to provide suitable facilities and resources to support the student for the duration of study.
- 14b.8 Applicants whose first language is not English must normally reach satisfactory IELTS scores, or the equivalent scores in other recognised Secure English Language Tests as outlined in the university's admissions regulations.
- 14b.9 The standard university admissions policies, procedures and regulations must be adhered to.

The research degree programme

Enrolment

- 14b.10 All students are required to enrol at the start of their programme of study. Thereafter, as continuing students, they are required to enrol at the commencement of each subsequent academic year during which they are undertaking study.

Duration of Study

- 14b.11 The periods of study for research degrees are as follows:

	Degree	Mode of Attendance	Standard Period	Maximum Period
	PhD	Full-time	36 months	48 months

Academic Standards and Quality Regulations 2026-27
Postgraduate regulations

	Degree	Mode of Attendance	Standard Period	Maximum Period
First registered FROM 2021-22	PhD	Part-time	72 months	84 months
	PhD by Prior Publication or Portfolio	Part-time	12 months	24 months
	MPhil (PhD exit award only)	Full-time	24 months	48 months
	MPhil (PhD exit award only)	Part-time	42 months	66 months
	Masters by Research (MRes)	Full-time	12 months	24 months
	Masters by Research (MRes)	Part-time	24 months	36 months

Table 2: Periods of study if registered FROM 2021-22

	Degree	Mode of Attendance	Standard Period	Maximum Period
First registered BEFORE 2021-22	PhD	Full-time	36 months	60 months
	PhD	Part-time	60 months	84 months
	MPhil (PhD exit award only)	Full-time	24 months	48 months
	MPhil (PhD exit award only)	Part-time	42 months	66 months
	Masters by Research (MRes)	Full-time	12 months	36 months
	Masters by Research (MRes)	Part-time	24 months	48 months

Table 3: Periods of study if registered BEFORE 2021-22

- 14b.12 RDC has the authority to recognise study at the same level undertaken in another institution as counting towards the total period of study, provided that it has not previously contributed to an academic award. Periods of registration should not be less than 12 months (full-time) or 24 months (part-time), except for PhD by Publication or Portfolio.
- 14b.13 Individuals applying for or transferring to a PhD may seek an exception to the standard period of study on the basis of previous study, provided that it has not already contributed to an academic award:
- for full-time students, the total period of study shall not be reduced to less than 24 months (PhD) or 12 months (MPhil), or
 - for part-time students, the total period of study shall not be reduced to less than 36 months (PhD) or 24 months (MPhil).

Extending registration

- 14b.14a For students first registered from 2021-22:

Extension period - If a thesis is not submitted for examination at the end of the thesis pending period (PhD) or at the end of the standard period of registration (MRes), on application by the student, RDC may exceptionally grant an extension of up to 12 months. No further period of extension will be permitted, and no extension will normally be approved that results in a thesis being submitted beyond the permitted maximum period of study.

14b.14b For students registered prior to 2021-22:

Continuation period - If a thesis is not submitted for examination at the end of the standard period of registration, full-time and part-time students will be entered into a continuation period of registration, whereby a further 12 months is given to complete their thesis.

During this time, the student will be entitled to continued access to library and computing facilities, but access to facilities for research may be limited and will be made available at the discretion of the academic partner. Supervision guidance will also continue to be provided, albeit likely to be on a more limited basis.

If a thesis has not been submitted for examination at the end of the continuation period, on application by the student, RDC may grant another extension of up to 12 months. No further period of extension will be permitted, and no extension will normally be approved that results in a thesis being submitted beyond the permitted maximum period of study.

14b.14c **PhD Thesis Pending** - Only available for students first registered from 2021-22:

If a thesis has not been submitted for examination at the end of the standard period of registration, full-time and part-time PhD students will be entered into a thesis pending period, whereby a further 12 months is given to complete their thesis. Some UKRI-funded programmes may differ.

During this time, the student will be entitled to continued access to library and computing facilities, but access to facilities for research may be limited and will be made available at the discretion of the academic partner. Supervision guidance will also continue to be provided, albeit likely to be on a more limited basis.

Suspensions

14b.15 On application by the student, RDC may grant a suspension of studies of up to 12 months in a single application. The maximum amount of time that may be suspended is 24 months. If a student does not return to study after 24 months of suspension their registration will be terminated. Time elapsed during a period of suspension will not count as part of the period of study in section 14b.11.

Change in mode of study

14b.16 On application by the student, RDC may allow those admitted as full-time students to change their mode of study to part-time for a specified period, or those admitted as part-time students to change their mode of study to full-time for a specified period. In such cases, the total period of study will be adjusted pro-rata.

Withdrawal and termination

14b.17 Students seeking to withdraw permanently from their research programme should discuss the matter with their Director of Studies or supervisory team and complete the student

Academic Standards and Quality Regulations 2026-27
Postgraduate regulations

withdrawal form. Further information about the withdrawal process can be found on the university website ([Thinking of leaving?](#)).

- 14b.18 RDC may terminate the registration of a student at any time provided it is satisfied there is sufficient reason for doing so (for example, unsatisfactory progress, see section 14b.22 below). Students may appeal their exclusion or termination of registration through the appeals procedure.

Supervision and progression

- 14b.19 The university will appoint an appropriate and qualified supervisory team, led by a Director of Studies.
- 14b.20 The Director of Studies shall be a suitably qualified individual currently employed by the university or one of its academic partners. RDC may consider other suitably qualified individuals on an exceptional basis. The Director of Studies has responsibility for the overall management and quality assurance of the student's supervision and for assessing the student's performance and engagement with the research programme.
- 14b.21 All students are required to make satisfactory and timely progress throughout their programme of study and participate in regular progress monitoring reviews.
- 14b.22 If a doctoral research degree student does not make satisfactory progress, their supervisory team may recommend to RDC that the student be transferred to a lower level of degree as appropriate or have their registration terminated.
- 14b.23 Students registered for all Masters by Research awards, who, with the support of their supervisory team, wish to progress instead to the award of PhD may apply to RDC for approval of transfer.

Assessment

- 14b.24 Final assessment of a student for a research degree award normally involves:
- Submission of thesis or equivalent body of work for examination
 - Independent examination of thesis or equivalent body of work by individual examiners
 - Oral examination of the student by an examination panel.

Appointment of examiners

- 14b.25 The university will appoint an examination panel to examine each thesis or equivalent body of work. The panel will normally consist of one internal examiner, one external examiner and one independent internal panel chair.

Submission of theses or equivalent bodies of work

- 14b.26 All students shall present to the university for examination a thesis or equivalent body of work embodying the results of their research, before the end of their approved period of study.
- 14b.27 Students who fail to submit before the end of their approved period of study will be automatically withdrawn and will, therefore, not be permitted to submit after that time. In

Academic Standards and Quality Regulations 2026-27
Postgraduate regulations

such cases, a student may apply to RDC to be reinstated in order to submit. If, exceptionally, reinstatement is approved, the student's thesis or equivalent body of work will be examined, subject to payment of a reinstatement fee.

- 14b.28 Every thesis or equivalent body of work submitted must:
- be written in English or, where appropriate, Gaelic
 - be prefaced by a signed formal declaration stating that:
 - it has been composed by the student
 - it is a record of work that has been done by that student
 - if any results were obtained partly in association with others, the nature or extent of this help, if substantial, is specifically acknowledged
 - not have been submitted for another degree awarded by this or any other university
 - contain an abstract not exceeding 300 words.

Examination of thesis or equivalent body of work

- 14b.29 Each examiner must first receive a copy of the thesis or equivalent body of work in advance of the oral examination and independently prepare a report detailing their preliminary assessment. These independent reports must be shared with panel members prior to the oral examination in order to support preparation for the oral examination.
- 14b.30 Oral examinations will normally be held within two months of the date of the initial dispatch of the thesis or equivalent body of work to the examiners.
- 14b.31 An oral examination will normally take place only when a thesis or equivalent body of work is first submitted.
- 14b.32 Oral examinations normally take place at the university or one of its academic partners, but may be held elsewhere or by video conference or similar method by the mutual agreement of the examination panel and the student.
- 14b.33 A member of the supervisory team may attend the oral examination as an observer on the agreement of the examination panel. The observer must take no part in the examination and must withdraw from the examination with the student prior to the deliberations of the examiners.

Criteria for assessment

- 14b.34 The standards to be attained for each degree require that:
- For doctoral degrees, the thesis makes a distinct and original contribution to knowledge in the discipline and contains work which is considered to be worthy of publication
 - For the degree of MPhil, the thesis makes a contribution to knowledge, affords evidence of originality and demonstrates application of independent research
 - For the degree of Masters by Research, the thesis displays evidence of originality or is a satisfactory, orderly and critical exposition of existing knowledge within the field concerned.

Outcomes of examination

- 14b.35 The examination panel will recommend one of the following outcomes:

Academic Standards and Quality Regulations 2026-27
Postgraduate regulations

	Outcome	Criteria
1	Pass	The degree is awarded unconditionally.
2	Pass, subject to minor corrections	The degree is awarded, subject to the completion of minor corrections to the satisfaction of the internal examiner.
3	Pass, subject to major corrections	The degree is awarded, subject to the completion of major corrections to the satisfaction of the internal and external examiners.
4	Resubmit	The student is required to make substantial corrections and to submit the thesis for re-examination by the internal and external examiners. This may require a second oral examination. Resubmission is permitted once only, and only minor corrections are permissible.
5	Award of lower degree	This outcome is available only where the target award is a doctoral degree. The intended degree is not awarded, but an MPhil is awarded instead. Minor corrections will be permitted.
6	Fail	The student is not awarded any degree.

Table 4: Outcomes of examination

- 14b.36 Following the oral examination, the panel will provide feedback to the student on its recommendations.
- 14b.37 The panel will submit to RDC for approval a jointly written report detailing its recommendations, supported by evidence to substantiate the outcome. Any corrections and amendments required will be listed, along with any requirement for a second oral examination. This report must be submitted to the university within one week of the oral examination taking place.
- 14b.38 If the examiners on the panel cannot substantially agree regarding the merits of the thesis, they will each be required to submit an independent report to RDC. These reports must include the same detail as required in section 14b.37 above. RDC will determine the most appropriate course of action, which can include recommending the appointment of a further external examiner.
- 14b.39 The student will be given formal confirmation of the outcome and a statement of corrections required if appropriate, normally within two weeks of the oral examination.
- 14b.40 The deadlines for corrections and/or re-submission will normally be:
- three months from the date of the exam outcome notification letter for minor corrections
 - six months from the date of the exam outcome notification letter for major corrections, or
 - twelve months from the date of the exam outcome notification letter for re-submission.

Academic Standards and Quality Regulations 2026-27
Postgraduate regulations

- 14b.41 Students who fail to make the necessary corrections, or to re-submit their thesis, within the stated deadline will not normally be permitted to submit after that date and will be withdrawn.
- 14b.42 The corrected/re-submitted thesis will be signed off by the internal examiner on behalf of the examination panel and confirmation of this sent to RDC for information.
- 14b.43 Once approved by RDC, the university will provide confirmation to the student in writing that they have been awarded the degree.
- 14b.44 If a student seeks to appeal against the outcome of a research degree examination they should follow the appeals procedure.

Posthumous awards

- 14b.45 On application by a Director of Studies, RDC may recommend the award of a posthumous research degree. A posthumous research degree will normally be awarded if a student has, at least, completed all but the last six weeks to two months (one-year degree), three to four months (two-year degree), four to six months (three-year degree); has effectively completed their research / investigation; and has moved into the writing up phase of their work and has submitted most, if not all, of their chapters in draft.

Academic misconduct

- 14b.46 PGR students are subject to the university's academic misconduct policy and procedures.

Thesis access, copyright and intellectual property rights

- 14b.47 Following submission of the final, corrected version of a student's thesis an electronic copy of the thesis will normally be stored within the university's institutional repository. A hard copy of the thesis will also be stored by the university.
- 14b.48 On application by the student, arrangements for confidentiality of theses may be approved by RDC and are normally limited to two years.
- 14b.49 PGR students are subject to the university's intellectual property policy.