



# **Postgraduate Research Code of Practice**

## **APPENDIX 12b**

### **Framework for Online Professional Doctorates**

**Applicable to all students who submit their initial thesis on  
or after 2nd September 2019**

This is the academic Framework for Online Professional Doctorate programmes. All such Professional Doctorate programmes should conform to this framework, which was initially approved by Senate on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2014 and the current (revised) version by Chair's action on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2016. All new programme proposals should be approved by the relevant University of Liverpool Faculty and Institutional approval panels.

The responsibility for all aspects of academic quality assurance of Online Professional Doctorates lies with the University of Liverpool.

Online Professional Doctorate programmes are subject to the provisions of the University of Liverpool's [PGR Code of Practice](#).

The Pre-Thesis Stage of Online Professional Doctorate programmes is subject to the provisions of the University of Liverpool's [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 Master's level which should be consistent with the requirements for 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 at least 360 credits must be FHEQ level 8<sup>1</sup> whilst up to 180 credits of the programme may be at FHEQ level 7. The Master's exit award should comprise at least 180 credits.
- d) All modules should be credit-rated and assigned a single level of either level 8 or level 7. Credit values should be assigned on the basis that 10 hours of student commitment should be allocated one credit point.
- e) The thesis should be worth 180 credits at level 8. A written thesis will normally contain at least 40,000 and no more than 50,000 words, unless permission is granted by the relevant Programme Director/Director of Studies for a thesis to be longer or shorter for sound academic reasons.
- f) A description of how level 8 and level 7 credit is delivered and assessed should be provided in module specifications. A description of the proportions of level 8 and level 7 credit within each programme should be provided in each programme specification. Credit may be awarded for work/practice-based learning, as specified in the relevant programme specification.
- g) Students who do not make satisfactory progress for continuation on the doctoral programme at any stage of the programme, may be considered for the award of Master's as an exit qualification providing they satisfy the requirements of the Master's degree set out in Appendix C of the Code of Practice on Assessment. Formal certification for this exit award will be provided to the student alongside a transcript showing credits taken.

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<sup>1</sup> Credit is awarded at level 8 for original research.

- h) Students may be permitted to enter the programme with recognition of prior learning (RPL) assessed on a case by case basis by the relevant Programme Director/Director of Studies, in accordance with the [University's RPL Policy](#).

## **2. Minimum and Maximum Periods of Registration**

An online Professional Doctorate programme is designed to be studied on a part time basis typically over a period of between 6.5 and 8 years, with the following minimum and maximum periods of time allowed between initial registration and completion of all taught modules, including any periods of repeated study (the pre-thesis stage), and for the completion of the doctoral thesis stage (the thesis stage).

### *Maximum period allowed for registration*

- a) The maximum period for a student's registration on an online Professional Doctorate programme is 6.5 years, *excluding* any periods of suspension.
- b) Students are permitted to suspend their studies for up to 18 months in total, due to extenuating circumstances; therefore any maximum period for which a student can be registered (including periods of suspension) is 8 years, excluding instances of major modifications or re-submission (for which see sections 2(f) and 2(g) below also).

### *Pre-thesis stage*

- c) This stage of the programme should be completed in no less than 2.5 years and in no more than 4 years from initial registration. The total time spent by a student in the pre-thesis stage has a direct impact on the remaining registration time available to them for completion of the thesis stage.
- d) Progression to the thesis stage within these timescales is dependent on successful completion of 360 credits.

### *Thesis stage*

- e) Submission of the doctoral thesis is required within no less than 1 year following progression to the thesis stage. It is normally expected that submission of the thesis will occur within 2.5 years; although, subject to the maximum period of registration not being exceeded and in cases where a candidate has successfully completed the pre-thesis stage within the minimum time permitted in section 2 c) above, up to 4 years may be taken to submit the thesis.
- f) Where a student submits their thesis towards the end of the maximum period allowed for registration on the programme and receives a pass with major modifications outcome following their *viva voce* (hereafter referred to as '*viva*') examination, they may be permitted an additional 3 months only in which to submit their modified thesis. In such circumstances the maximum period of registration permitted would be 6 years and 9 months, excluding any period of suspension permitted under section 2(b) above.
- g) Where a student submits their thesis towards the end of the maximum period allowed for registration on the programme and is required to re-submit their thesis by the Examiners following their *viva* examination, they may be permitted one exceptional further year only to re-submit their thesis. In such circumstances the maximum period of registration permitted would be 7.5 years, excluding any period of suspension permitted under section 2(b) above.

### **3. Supervision of the thesis**

- 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) Each online Professional Doctorate programme must have a process to approve research proposals and to ensure that projects obtain appropriate research ethics approval, in accordance with University of Liverpool procedures.
- f) For each online Professional Doctorates programme students will normally be assigned to research groups and will be expected to engage with their research community, supported by the supervisory team as well as receiving individual supervision from their primary supervisor.
- g) 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**

*All taught modules at level 7 or 8 in the Pre-thesis stage*

- a) Students' academic progress on online Professional Doctorate programmes will be monitored by the relevant Board of Examiners in accordance with the University's Code of Practice on Assessment.
- b) All online 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. Students may re-take failed modules on one occasion only.
- 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 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. Re-sitting or re-taking of failed assessment will be undertaken on one further occasion only in accordance with the relevant module and programme specifications. Any re-assessment will normally be undertaken and passed before registration on the next module is permitted. Students may not attempt more than 540 credits throughout the whole programme.
- e) No student may proceed to the thesis stage of the programme carrying any failed modules.

- f) Appeals against module marks (except for the thesis) should be made in accordance with the University's Code of Practice on Assessment, Appendix F, Section One.
- g) 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](#).

*Thesis stage*

- h) Students' academic progress during the thesis stage of the programme will be considered by an Independent Progress Assessment Panel (IPAP), in accordance with the University's PGR Code of Practice.
- i) The doctoral thesis will be examined by at least two Examiners one of whom will be external to the University of Liverpool. None of the Examiners will be employed by or connected with Laureate Online Education. Where the student is a member of staff of the University of Liverpool, or where the student's employment with any other organisation may require additional external scrutiny to ensure sufficient independence within the examination process, two External Examiners will be appointed in addition to an Internal Examiner.
- j) A *viva* examination will take place, which will normally be conducted using video-conferencing in accordance with Appendix 9 of the PGR Code of Practice: Policy and Procedures for Conducting Remote *Viva Voce* (*Viva*) Examinations for Research Degrees.
- k) Internal Examiners shall be appointed by the relevant Head of Department or Dean of School in accordance with the University of Liverpool's PGR Code of Practice.
- l) External Examiners shall be nominated by the programme teams and approved by the relevant Faculty Director of Postgraduate Research. Each External Examiner will be appointed on an annual basis for a maximum of four years and join a 'pool' of appropriately qualified experts, to be nominated and approved by the relevant Faculty Director of Postgraduate Research, to examine individual theses.
- m) No person shall be appointed as Examiner for the examination of a thesis for which they have acted as supervisor in any capacity.
- n) No person shall be appointed as an External Examiner for the examination of a thesis if they are employed in the same department in an institution as one of the student's supervisors.
- o) The submission of the thesis will be in accordance with the procedure agreed between the University of Liverpool and Kaplan Open Learning.
- p) Examiners will be provided with all relevant academic regulations, including advice on the expectations of the academic quality and standard for a professional doctoral thesis and expectations for conducting remote *viva* examinations in accordance with University Policy.
- q) The supervisors and candidate must not contact the appointed Examiners prior to the *viva* to discuss any matter connected to the examination, other than logistical arrangements, in accordance with Appendix 8 of the PGR Code of Practice: Policy on Research Degree Examinations and Examiners.
- r) 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, 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, within a period of no longer than 6 months, provided that this period of time does not exceed the maximum period of registration of the candidate on the programme;
  - iii. that the degree of Professional Doctorate be conferred subject to the candidate making *major* modifications to the thesis. Whilst the Examiners agree that the submission is generally of the standard required for the award sought, some re-structuring and/ or clarification of arguments is required to the thesis 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, within a period of no longer than 9 months, provided that this period of time does not exceed the maximum period of registration of the candidate on the programme. 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 re-submit the doctoral thesis on one occasion only within a prescribed re-submission period which should be no more than two years and re-submit for the award of Professional Doctorate, provided that this period of time does not exceed the maximum period of registration of the candidate on the programme. In re-submission cases a second *viva* must be held in order to allow the candidate the opportunity to defend their thesis;
  - v. that the thesis has not met the required doctoral standard and that the degree of Master is recommended based upon the student's work at the pre-thesis stage. The student's eligibility for a master's level exit award will be determined by the appropriate Board of Examiners;
  - vi. that the candidate be deemed not to have attained the standard required for the Professional Doctorate degree, that no Professional Doctorate award be made and there be no further opportunity for examination. 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. The student's eligibility for a master's level exit award (based on their work at the pre-thesis stage) will be determined by the appropriate Board of Examiners. Suspected cases of academic misconduct should be handled in accordance with Appendix 4 of the PGR Code of Practice: PGR Academic Integrity Policy.
- s) Under normal circumstances a re-submitted thesis would be re-examined by *viva* examination with the same Examiners, unless the Examiners decide otherwise.
- t) Following the re-examination of a thesis, the Examiners are permitted to recommend only outcomes (i) (ii) (v) or (vi) as listed above. Candidates will not be allowed a further period of re-submission.

- u) 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.