

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 College”)**. 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 College.
- (ii) This document should be read in conjunction with other relevant published documentation relating to research students including; programme requirement information provided by the department, where appropriate any requirements published by funding bodies and the College 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 However, appendices or footnotes may be amended or withdrawn as appropriate by the College without reference to Academic Board.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- (vi) These regulations are applicable to all students within the scope of the regulations until rescinded by the appropriate authority of the College.
- (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 College for these degrees:
 - Master of Philosophy (MPhil)
 - Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
- (ix) The College also award the following specialist doctorates where separate regulations may apply.

Master of Philosophical Studies (MPhilStud)

Doctor of Psychology (D-Psych).

Doctor in Occupational Health Psychology (DrOHP)

Application of the Regulations

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

Effective Dates for the Regulations

- (xi) These regulations will be effective from the beginning of the academic session 2017/18.

Academic Year

- (xii) Dates of the academic year are specified by the Academic Board of the **College. The academic year will normally start in October. The word “year”** when used without limitations means calendar year.

Definition of Terms

- (xiii) 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 College, in line with the QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.

College: **reference to ‘The College’ should be taken to refer to Birkbeck, University of London.**

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 Student: research students are students studying a research degree (normally for the award of MPhil or PhD) at the College, to whom the College's research degree regulations apply.

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

1.0 Admission and Registration of Students onto Research Programmes

- 1.1 In order to be considered for an award of the College students must be admitted by the College and must register and enrol for a programme of study offered by the College.
- 1.2 **All decisions on admission will be taken in accordance with the College'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 College while registered as a student for the equivalent qualification of any other university or institution.

2.0 Period of Student Registration

- 2.1 The minimum period of registration with the College 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).

3.0 Maximum Period of Registration

- 3.1 The maximum period of registration for a research degree is normally 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 will normally be terminated on the grounds of failure of academic progress, **under the provisions of the College's Policy and Procedure for the Termination of a Student's Registration on a Programme of Study. Any decision to terminate a student's registration on the programme shall be made by the departmental PGR Committee.**

- 3.3 Research students whose circumstances have significantly constrained their ability to submit within the maximum registration period may apply for an extension. Proposals for extension beyond the maximum period of registration must be supported by the supervisor and PGR director and will be considered by the Research Student Sub-Committee on a case by case basis. Extensions are not automatically approved and a case must be made for the delay in submission, as well as a schedule for completion. Proposals for extensions may only be made in advance.
- 4.0 Interruption of Studies
- 4.1 Students may spend a maximum of two years during their programme on **'Break in Study' status, in accordance with the College's Break In Study Policy**. Students who do not re-enrol by the end of this period will be considered to have withdrawn from the programme of study, and their registration will be terminated.
- 5.0 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 College and must enrol to the satisfaction of the College.
- 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 Committee or delegated body, as to whether admission to the next year of the programme of study will be offered or not.**¹
- 5.4 **Any decision to terminate a student's registration on the programme shall be made by the PGR Committee under the provisions of the College's Policy and Procedure for the Termination of a Student's Registration on a Programme of Study**

¹ See also the College's Policy on the Termination of Registration of a Student

6.0 Upgrade from MPhil to PhD

- 6.1 All students who wish to transfer from MPhil to PhD status must complete an upgrade examination to evidence their academic progress.
- 6.2 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 Department.

7.0 Writing Up Status

- 7.1 In accordance with the Policy on Writing Up students, after completing an approved programme of study and providing satisfactory academic **progress is made, 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 Committee.**
- 7.3 The maximum period of registration specified in 3.1 includes time spent in writing up status.
- 7.4 **The candidate's PGR Committee may 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.**

8.0 Withdrawal from a Programme of Study

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

PART TWO: REQUIREMENTS OF A THESIS

9.0 Requirements for both MPhil and PhD 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

10.0 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.

11.0 Requirements for PhD thesis only

- 11.1 In addition to the requirements listed in 9.0 above, the PhD thesis must:
- 11.2 **Indicate how the candidate's investigations appear to the candidate to advance the study of the subject.**
- 11.3 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.
- 11.4 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.
- 11.5 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.

² The College 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.

11.6 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).

12.0 Word Count

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

PART THREE: ASSESSMENT

- 13.0 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.
 - 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).
 - 13.4 A candidate must have the title of their thesis approved by their supervisor(s).
 - 13.5 The decision to submit a thesis in any particular form rests with the candidate alone.
 - 13.6 Additionally, a candidate must provide a digital copy of the thesis to the College for submission to plagiarism detection software.³
- 14.0 Examination of MPhil or PhD degree
- 14.1 A candidate must be fully enrolled when entering the examination for MPhil or PhD degree.
 - 14.2 A candidate must submit appropriate forms and information when entering their thesis for examination, as stipulated by the Birkbeck Graduate Research School. Candidates should ensure they are aware of the requirements and deadlines for submission.
 - 14.3 Examiners will be appointed for each candidate in accordance with the procedures adopted for the appointment of examiners by the College. 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 determined by two or more examiners acting jointly.
 - 14.4 The examiners, after reading the thesis, must examine the candidate orally, and at their discretion by written papers or practical examination,

³ See also section 18: Research Misconduct

or by both methods on the subject of the thesis and, if they see fit, on other relevant subjects.

- 14.5 **It is at the examiners' discretion to decide whether the candidate should supply their thesis in digital format, and/or as a hard copy, before examination.**
- 14.6 The examiners will normally prepare independent preliminary written reports on the thesis to assist in conducting the oral examination. After any oral examination, a joint final report must be prepared and both preliminary and joint reports must be submitted to the Birkbeck Graduate Research School.
- 14.7 The supervisor(s) will 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 supervisor(s) 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 a 3rd examiner will be appointed.

15.0 Outcome of the Examination

- 15.1 After the oral examination, the examiners must decide on one of the following outcomes:
 - i. Pass without amendments
 - ii. Conditional pass with minor amendments, to be made within 6 months. This may only be offered on one occasion per candidate
 - iii. Major revisions and resubmission for examination, within 18 months for a PhD degree, or 12 months for an MPhil degree. This may only be offered on one occasion per candidate. Where a PhD or MPhil has been resubmitted following an outcome of major revisions, one opportunity can be provided to make changes as minor amendments as specified in ii). It is not possible for a further outcome of major revisions to be offered after resubmission.

- iv. [When submitting for PhD] Offer of MPhil, or offer of MPhil after 6 months' revisions
 - v. Fail without option of resubmission
- 15.2 **If examiners decide on outcome 15.1.iii, it is at the examiners' discretion** whether a second oral examination is required.
- 15.3 If a candidate is asked by the examiners to make amendments to their **thesis under 15.1.ii or 15.1.iii, it is the candidate's** responsibility to resubmit the amended thesis by the stipulated deadline. 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 the RSSC Chair accepts evidence that circumstances have significantly constrained their ability to resubmit and the examiners agree to consider work beyond the original deadline that was set.
- 15.4 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 those cases new examiner(s) will be appointed through the standard procedure for nominating examiners.
- 16.0 Conferment of Award
- 16.1 When a candidate has satisfied the examiners in the oral examination, they must submit one digital copy and one bound copy of their thesis to the Birkbeck Library.⁴
- 16.2 **Once both copies are received by the College, the candidate's award will** be put forward for approval by Academic Board or delegated authority.
- 16.3 Once approved, candidates will receive formal notification of their award from the College.
- 16.4 The diploma for the degree will bear the name of the candidate in the form in which they appear in the records of the College at the date of issue.

⁴ A candidate may apply to the College 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 College for consideration of such applications.

17.0 Appeals

- 17.1 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 Committee to terminate their registration via the process outlined under regulation 5.3.
- 17.2 **Any appeal will be considered in line with the College's Appeals Policy and Procedure (Research).**

18.0 Research Misconduct

- 18.1 If at any point during the examination process, allegations are raised of research misconduct, including, but not limited to plagiarism and **fabrication of data, the matter will be referred to the College's 'Procedure for reporting and investigating research misconduct; or the College's 'Assessment Offences Policy', as appropriate.**
- 18.2 The examination process will be suspended until any such investigation is completed.

Academic Board
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