

POLICY FOR RESEARCH DEGREE AEGROTAT AND POSTHUMOUS AWARDS

1. Policy Statement

1.1 The University's Research Degrees Committee (RDC) has agreed the following policy for posthumous and aegrotat research degree awards. This underpins R9.7 of the MPhil/PhD Regulations and all corresponding regulations for all other research degree awards. It relates to research degree candidates who either die or suffer serious health impairment which results in an inability to complete the normal two-part assessment by thesis and the defence of that through an oral examination. RDC will allow for some adjustments and exemptions to the normal assessment process to facilitate these candidates to conferment of a research degree award. This policy applies to all research degrees including MProf as an exit award from the Professional Doctorate programmes.

1.2 In the case of either an aegrotat or posthumous award, the candidate must be beyond the minimum duration of study for the award (as per the timescales below) and have completed a significant body of their research degree work.

Degree & Mode	Normal minimum permissible time for completion from date of enrolment	Normal maximum permissible time for completion from date of enrolment¹
MPhil		
Full-time	18 months	24 months
Part-time	30 months	36 months
PhD		
Full-time	24 months	48 months
Part-time	36 months	84 months
Professional Doctorate		
Full-time	36 months	60 months
Part-time	48 months	84 months

For candidates on the MA by Research in English or History or the LLM research degree programmes, in the absence of minimum completion timescales, these candidates will need to have completed a significant amount of their research. RDC would normally expect a candidate to be more than half-way through their programme of study.

1.3 A student who has disclosed a disability to the university and has a learning contract, will already have in place any reasonable adjustments required for their final assessment. However, in cases where something else affects the

¹ Allowing for any period of interruption of study approved via break in study – see R5.3

candidate which is over and above the remit of the learning contract, such as a sudden worsening of a known condition or a newly diagnosed condition which has immediate impact, then the candidate is also eligible to apply for an aegrotat award.

- 1.4 This policy does not cover instances where candidates suffer sudden and unexpected extenuating circumstances which are over and above normal life circumstances, but which impact on the timing of the oral examination. Candidates in these situations will be expected to apply for a deferral of their viva if the extenuation is suitably evidenced and has a timing link to the assessment.

2. Assessment/Decision-making for the Award

Assessment and decision-making for an award will depend on which research degree programme a candidate is registered on. Either an appointed examining team or RDC will make assessment decisions, to be ratified by the Dean of Research, in accordance with the following guidance:

Doctorate, MPhil, MA by Research and LLM by Research	MProf (an exit award from the Professional Doctorate programmes)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the assessment will take place by an examining team which is appointed in accordance with the research degree regulations • the decision will be based on the independent assessment of the submission by each examiner and a joint recommendation • the decision will be ratified by the Dean of Research and the award conferred 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the assessment will take place by RDC • the evidence base on which this decision will be made is two-fold; the Programme Lead will provide a statement to confirm that the candidate has passed the mandatory complementary studies modules required of the programme, and the Director of Studies will provide a testimony of the candidate's progress in the research phase • the decision will be ratified by the Dean of Research and the award conferred.

3. Posthumous awards

A posthumous award may be requested for a deceased candidate by a supervisor, family member, employer, etc. The Director of Studies will be responsible for facilitating this request. A posthumous award may be granted to a deceased candidate following assessment by an examining team or RDC, depending on the type of award requested (as noted in section 2 above). Guidance is provided below regarding the correct procedure to be applied, depending on the candidate's stage of study at the time of their death.

3.1 Before the thesis has been presented for examination

If a candidate has died before submitting their thesis, the Director of Studies, in discussion with the supervisory team, will need to consider an alternative submission of the candidate's work. This may include a draft thesis, draft chapters, any published material, data/results analysis etc, all bound together to constitute a thesis. This must strongly evidence the candidate's progress with the research. The Director of Studies will be required to write a critical introduction to the work for contextual purposes and to aid understanding by the reader.

3.2 After the thesis has been submitted and sent to examiners but before the oral examination has been held.

If the thesis has been submitted and/or already sent to examiners (for all submissions excluding MProf), the usual assessment process will take place in accordance with section 2 above. Examiners will be asked to submit independent reports on the thesis and present a joint report confirming their decision. This will involve their academic judgement on whether the candidate would likely have succeeded in passing their award, if the viva had taken place. In Doctoral assessments, examiners will have the usual option of deciding whether the submission constitutes attainment at either Doctoral or Masters' level.

4. Aegrotat awards

4.1 An aegrotat means that a student is 'excused/exempt' from part of an assessment based on medical certification, constituting ill health. The university defines this for the purposes of research degree assessment as the candidate presenting evidenced mitigation in relation to one or both parts of the assessment. In all cases, candidates must either submit a full version of their thesis (if it is finished) or evidence of achievement at the level, as per previous section 3. An aegrotat can be awarded on written evidence alone, without a viva, but in all cases, **a written submission is mandatory.**

4.2 All requests for aegrotat awards should be:

- made in writing to RDC by the candidate,
- accompanied by evidence from an independent practitioner confirming the issues reported by the candidate, and the timing/duration of the condition(s),
- written with the support of the candidate's Director of Studies.

The principle here is that the university will not require a candidate to undertake an oral examination if, based on the statement and evidence presented, RDC agrees that the candidate would be seriously and negatively impacted on by doing so. The evidence must be timely, and confirm that the candidate would be disadvantaged in the assessment by

their state of health at the time a viva would normally be held, i.e. within 4 to 6 weeks of submitting the thesis (or equivalent written submission).

- 4.3 In cases where a viva is waived, the examination process will proceed as normal, but the viva will be held in the absence of the candidate. The examiners, the Director of Studies and the Independent Chair will meet to discuss the work and a joint report will be submitted after the viva to confirm the examiners' joint decision. In cases where examiners cannot agree, each will complete a separate joint report form and RDC will make a decision, which usually involves the input of an additional examiner.
- 4.4 Where a candidate is awarded a research degree subject to the satisfactory completion of amendments within a 4 month FTE timescale, the Director of Studies will need to confirm whether the candidate is able to undertake the work themselves, or if the supervisory team will need to input to this and liaise with the examiner(s) for sign off.
- 4.5 If the candidate's health prevents them from completing the amendments, the Director of Studies can complete them on their behalf. Acknowledgement of this will be prefaced in the thesis.

5. Certification

- 5.1 A standard research degree certificate will be issued to successful candidates. The certificate will not include any reference to aegrotat or posthumous award.

Research Degrees Committee

Approved with effect from the 2019-20 academic year

Regulatory references updated for 2022-23