



## University Criteria for Making Research Degree Awards at Doctoral and Masters Level

Keele University wishes to ensure that its awards are made at the recognisable national standard, and subscribes to the descriptions of learning outcomes required at doctoral and masters level as set out by the Quality Assurance Agency in August 2008 (The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, now incorporated as part of Part A of the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#)). Examiners should use the following criteria when deciding whether candidates for research degrees have met the requirements for an award.

### Doctoral Level

D1 For all awards to be made at Doctoral level (PhD, EdD, DBA, DM, MD, DPsych, DPharm, DSW), students must achieve the required learning outcomes:

Doctorates are awarded to students who have demonstrated:-

- a) the creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research, or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline, and merit publication;
- b) a systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline or area of professional practice;
- c) the general ability to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge, applications or understanding at the forefront of the discipline, and to adjust the project design in the light of unforeseen problems;
- d) a detailed understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry;
- e) [professional doctorate students only] competence in independent work, professional activity or experimentation, of understanding of the appropriate techniques, and of competence in making critical use of published work and source materials. The thesis shall be a major contribution to the creation and interpretation of new knowledge (see also section D5)

D2 For the award of PhD, the thesis shall be no longer than 100,000 words (to include main text and footnotes, but not references and appendices). Although there is no lower word limit for thesis length, the thesis must be long enough to explore the subject in sufficient depth and breadth to fulfil the requirements for the degree. Clarity and succinctness of expression is valued. The literary style and presentation of the thesis should be satisfactory. The PhD candidate will be required to satisfy the Senate that it affords evidence of originality, shown either by the discovery of new facts or by the exercise of independent critical power. For the award of a professional doctorate, the thesis shall be of a length prescribed in the programme regulations which will normally be between 60,000 and 75,000 words (to include main text and footnotes, but not references and appendices). Although there is no lower word limit for thesis length, the thesis must be long enough to explore the subject in sufficient depth and breadth to fulfil the requirements for the degree. Clarity and succinctness of expression is valued. The literary style and presentation of the thesis should be satisfactory. The

professional doctorate candidate will be required to satisfy the Senate that it contains evidence of originality, shown either by the discovery of new facts or by the exercise of independent critical power (see also section D5).

### **D3 Musical Composition**

A candidate in musical composition is required to submit a folio of original compositions, in the form of scores or, in the case of electronic music, recordings (or equivalent) on appropriate media. A written introduction is also required, which covers all the works submitted, giving background information as well as details relating to aesthetic and technical concerns.

Where part of a candidate's research has included the production of original software or other tools which have assisted the realisation of the portfolio then these may also form part of the submission. Alternatively, and particularly where the compositions or other musical examples are mainly illustrative of the capability of such tools, then the candidate should submit under regulation D1. Wherever possible, the appropriate submission pathway should be determined at the outset with the supervisor.

For submissions consisting solely of musical compositions the following guidelines will apply:

- A folio should either consist of several compositions, of which at least three shall be considered substantial by the examiners by virtue of content (e.g. in terms of scale, duration, original techniques or use of authored software tools) OR a single large-scale work such as an opera;
- In musical composition a candidate will be required to satisfy the Senate that the submission shows clear evidence of creative ability and academic competence, and represents an original and significant contribution to the art of music. Also, that instruments and voices are written for within their capabilities, and that performing instructions and layout are accurate in detail.

### **D4 Visual Arts**

A candidate wishing to combine academic and creative research may, instead of a thesis, submit all three of the following:

- a) a substantial body of creative work which has been documented and recorded by means appropriate for the purposes of examination and eventual deposit in the University Library;
- b) an accompanying thesis of no more than 50,000 words showing clear evidence of academic competence, an awareness of the current critical context in which the creative work has been produced and an original contribution to research into the relationship between history and/or theory and practice;
- c) a selection of work, referred to under (a) suitable for exhibition.

### **D5 Professional and Taught Doctorates**

Professional and other taught doctorates will be required to have Programme Regulations which set out the formal structure of the course including cohort work and research training, and any forms of interim and summative assessment, as well as any additional entry requirements.

The thesis for a professional or taught doctorate will be between 60,000 words and 75,000 words (to include main text and footnotes, but not references and appendices). Although there is no lower word limit for thesis length, the thesis must be long enough to explore the subject in sufficient depth and breadth to fulfil the requirements for the degree. Clarity and succinctness of expression is valued.

Additionally candidates will have been formally assessed (through in-course assessment or written examination or both) on the taught elements of their doctoral Programme of Study, as set out in the Programme Regulations.

The examiners will in particular be looking for a candidate's competence in independent work, professional activity or experimentation, of understanding of the appropriate techniques, and of competence in making critical use of published work and source materials. The thesis shall be a major contribution to the creation and interpretation of new knowledge as applied to the candidate's professional area.

#### **D6 Doctoral Degree by Publication**

A PhD degree by published work falls under University Regulation C10 and is mostly beyond the scope of the Code of Practice in so far as it deals with supervision.

There is a requirement for an oral examination which can only be waived in exceptional circumstances agreement of the Research Degrees Committee. The criteria to be applied in the examination of a doctorate by publication are those set out in D1 above.

Recommendations available to examiners of research degrees are set out in Regulation 2D (11.3), except that for degrees by published research only recommendations 1, 2, 6 and 7 are available (see Annex A2). No resubmissions will be permitted, and any minor revisions may relate only to the critical commentary.

#### **Masters Level**

M1 For an award to be made at Masters level (MPhil) students must achieve the required learning outcomes:

Masters degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- f) a systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study, or area of professional practice ;
- g) a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship;
- h) originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline;
- i) conceptual understanding that enables the student:
  - to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline; and
  - to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses.

M2 The thesis shall be no longer than 60,000 words (to include main text and footnotes, but not references and appendices). Although there is no lower word limit for thesis length, the thesis must be long enough to explore the subject in sufficient depth and breadth to fulfil the requirements for the degree. Clarity and succinctness of expression is valued. The literary style and presentation of the thesis should be satisfactory. The candidate will be required to satisfy the Senate of competence in independent work or experimentation, of understanding of the appropriate techniques, and of competence in making critical use of published work and source materials. The thesis shall normally consist of a critical review of the field of research together with some new results but may, if approved by the Senate, take the form of a critical review only.

### M3 **Musical Composition**

A candidate in musical composition is required to submit a folio of original compositions, in the form of scores, or, in the case of electronic music, recordings (or equivalent) on appropriate media. A written introduction is also required, which covers all the works submitted, giving background information as well as details relating to aesthetic and technical concerns.

Where part of a candidate's research has included the production of original software or other tools which have assisted the realisation of the portfolio then these may also form part of the submission. Alternatively, and particularly where the compositions or other musical examples are mainly illustrative of the capability of such tools, then the candidate should submit under regulation M1. Wherever possible, the appropriate submission pathway should be determined at the outset with the supervisor.

For submissions consisting solely of musical compositions the following guidelines will apply:

The submission should either consist of up to three contrasted pieces of music of moderate substance and/or length or a single extended work. In musical composition a candidate will be required to satisfy the Senate that the submission shows clear evidence of creative ability and academic competence, and represents an original and significant contribution to the art of music. Also, that instruments and voices are written for within their capabilities, and that performing instructions and layout are accurate in detail.

### M4 **Visual Arts**

Instead of a thesis, candidates may submit all three of the following:

- a) a body of creative work which has been documented and recorded by means appropriate for the purposes of examination and eventual deposit in the University Library
- b) an accompanying thesis of no more than 30,000 words showing clear evidence of academic competence and awareness of the current critical context in which the creative work has been produced
- c) a selection of work referred to under (a) suitable for exhibition

The proposed submission must be approved at the start of the course by the Director of the relevant Research Institute.