



**Procedures for Submission and Examination of
Research Masters Degrees**

in

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1 Introduction

1.1 A Masters degree is awarded to suitably qualified candidates who prepare a thesis describing original research which is their own work. There are a number of different Research Masters degree qualifications in UCC (e.g., MSc, MPhil, M Eng Science, MRes).

1.2 The candidate may also be required to pass an examination on the subject matter of the thesis.

1.3 The Examination Board consists of Examiners who are both internal and external to the University, with the External Examiner being an expert in the field of study of the thesis.

1.4 These guidelines are intended to help candidates and Examiners to understand their contributions to, and roles in, the examination and the general procedures operated by the University in regard to research masters examinations.

1.5 A student must pursue a programme of supervised research and have completed their approved period of registration in order to submit a Masters Thesis. It is a University requirement that all current masters students are registered until their thesis is submitted for examination.

1.6 Except where shorter periods are specified in the regulations for specific degrees, a candidate for a Research Masters Degree will be allowed a maximum of five years in the case of the College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences, three years in the case of Engineering, or four years in all other cases to submit their thesis. Candidates who do not submit their thesis within the prescribed number of years from the date of first registration for the programme for which they have been approved will require approval for extensions from the relevant College and must be registered at the time of thesis submission. A detailed review must be undertaken as outlined in the Progress Review Policy <https://www.ucc.ie/en/study/postgrad/currentresearchstudents/guidelines/>

2 Preparing Research Masters Theses

2.1 Drafts of the thesis should be prepared under the guidance of the supervisor(s). The thesis format should conform to disciplinary norms within the University. In addition, feedback the candidate may have received during their research programme (e.g., through monitoring by a Graduate Studies Committee and/or Thesis Committee) may be useful in terms of the expectations of the likely content and format of the eventual thesis.

2.2 Candidates should familiarise themselves with the norms and regulations, where appropriate, applying in their School/Department for research masters theses, especially with regard to length, style, literature citation and layout.

2.3 When a thesis is submitted, a signed declaration must be included, stating that the thesis submitted is the candidate's own work and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere. This declaration must explicitly make reference to the fact that the candidate is aware of the importance of plagiarism and that the text presented for examination does not include plagiarised material. The following wording should be used:

“This is to certify that the work I am submitting is my own and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere. All external references and sources are clearly acknowledged and identified within the contents. I have read and understood the regulations of University College Cork concerning plagiarism.”

2.4 Supervisors should make students aware of all aspects of plagiarism in preparation of their thesis. Plagiarism in research degree theses constitutes a very significant breach of examination regulations and the Procedure for Investigating allegations of Plagiarism in Research Theses may be found at

<https://www.ucc.ie/en/study/postgrad/currentresearchstudents/guidelines/>

2.5 The use of external professional individuals or organisations for proof-reading, copy-editing of theses or other services on a paid basis is not permitted, and students found to have engaged such assistance in preparing their thesis will be deemed to be in breach of examination regulations.

2.6 In the case of the College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences, the length of an MPhil Degree thesis should normally be approximately 40,000 words.

2.7 In the case of the College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences, the length of an MRES thesis should normally be approximately 25,000 words.

3 Submission Procedure

3.1 In consultation with the supervisor(s), the candidate submits an Intention to Submit Form to the Graduate Studies Office at least three months before the likely date of submission. Failure to do this will delay the examination. (<http://www.ucc.ie/en/graduatestudies/thesis/>)

3.2 The Graduate Studies Office then notifies the Head of School/Department, who arranges for an Approval of Examiners Form to be completed and sent to the relevant Graduate School for approval, before being forwarded to the Graduate Studies Office. A completed biographical form for the External Examiner(s) and Internal Examiner(s) must accompany the form. (<http://www.ucc.ie/en/graduatestudies/thesis/>)

3.3 When the final draft of the thesis is ready, one copy per Examiner is submitted in soft-bound form to the Graduate Studies Office, and a Thesis Submission Form signed by the supervisor(s) and Head of School/Department. (<http://www.ucc.ie/en/graduatestudies/thesis/>)

3.4 Any student who believes that such a signature(s) has been unreasonably withheld may still submit their thesis, but must be notified in writing by the Head of School/Department that this is against the advice of the School/Department. In such cases, the supervisor(s) must submit an independent report to the Head of School/Department outlining the reasons for not supporting submission. The Head of School/Department (or Chair of the Graduate Studies Committee if the Head is a supervisor of the student in question) should transmit this report to the Head of the Graduate Studies Office. This will then be considered alongside the report(s) arising from the Examination by the Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee before a final recommendation is made to Academic Board on the result of the examination of the thesis. In cases where the thesis is rejected or failed, the Graduate Studies

Office will notify Examiners of the fact that the supervisor did not approve submission of the thesis after the Examination is complete.

3.5 No changes may be made to the thesis after submission to the Graduate Studies Office and the External and Internal Examiners may not communicate with the candidate about the thesis in the period between the submission of the thesis for examination and the completion of the examination process.

3.6 The Graduate Studies Office will send the thesis to all Examiners, along with the Procedures for Submission and Examination of Research Master Degrees and details of the dates of meetings of the Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee to which reports should be returned.

3.7 The process of reading and examining the thesis should normally take a maximum of three months.

4 The Examination of Research Masters Degrees

4.1 The Examination Board normally consists of two Examiners for every thesis: an External Examiner and an Internal Examiner.

4.2 If the candidate is a member of staff of UCC academic staff, or a permanent member of staff of the University, or holds an employment contract of 3 or more years, either full-time or part-time, there will be a second External Examiner. For the purposes of this regulation, a candidate will not be classified as a part-time member of staff where:

- I. they only carry out work for the School/Department pursuant to a student support scheme or
- II. they are paid on an hourly basis, and, in the opinion of the Head of School/Department is not such as to justify the application of the rule requiring an additional External Examiner.

4.3 In the case of Research theses in inter-disciplinary fields, where a reasoned academic case may be made that a broader diversity of academic expertise is required to examine the thesis, the Examination Board may be extended to include an additional Internal and/or External Examiner, to a maximum of four examiners in total.

4.4 The Examiners are nominated by the Head of School/Department following consultation with the local School/Department Graduate Studies Committee, the supervisor(s) and other relevant expertise where appropriate (e.g., Head of Discipline). The nomination is countersigned by the appropriate Graduate School. In the case of any conflict of interest by the Head of School/Department (e.g. if the Head is also a supervisor), the nomination should be made by the Head of College. In the case of a conflict of interest by the Head of College, the nomination should be made by the Deputy President and Registrar.

4.5 The External Examiner should have a strong track-record in the research field of the thesis and will normally have experience of examining Masters theses elsewhere. The Head of School/Department must satisfy themselves as to the expertise of proposed External Examiner(s) in the subject of the thesis and a biographical information form must be filled out for each proposed External Examiner so that an informed decision can be made.

4.6 The Internal Examiner is expected to have sufficient knowledge and understanding of the subject area of the research topic to enable them to judge the quality of the thesis, and he or she is expected to play a full part in determining the outcome of the examination. The Head of School/Department must satisfy themselves as to the experience of the proposed Internal Examiner(s) and a biographical information form must be filled out for each proposed Internal Examiner so that an informed decision can be made.

4.7 There must be no conflict of interest, whether personal, professional or commercial, between the proposed Examiners of a thesis and the candidate, supervisor, University or subject matter. Specific examples of circumstances which may lead to a conflict of interest include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Formal association between the External Examiner and UCC (e.g., as staff member or student) within the past five years;
- A personal or family relationship with the candidate or supervisor;
- Co-authorship of publications with the candidate;
- Collaboration with the candidate in the work described in the thesis;
- Acting as External Examiner for a thesis by the same supervisor in the past three years, unless a strong reasoned case for this being the best examiner for the thesis is presented;
- Commercial interest in the work described in the thesis;
- Acting in the past, or near future, as an employer of the candidate;
- Substantial contact with the candidate or supervisor in any other circumstance which might jeopardise the independence of the examination.

4.8 Any requests for deviation from the regulations on the composition of the Examination Board must be approved by the Chair of Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee.

5 Oral Examination

5.1 There is not normally a viva voce examination for Research Masters theses, but if all examiners request this, the Internal Examiner should contact the Chair of the Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee for guidance and approval, and procedures to be followed should be as described in the UCC Procedures for the Submission and Examination of Doctoral Degrees.

6 Award of Research Masters Degrees

6.1 When considering the thesis under examination, the Examiners may give particular attention to the following (subject to the nature of the discipline(s) in question, and being mindful of the national and European descriptors for Level 9 qualifications):

Knowledge of the field:

- Does the thesis demonstrate a systematic understanding of knowledge at, or informed by, the forefront of a field of learning?
- Does the thesis demonstrate a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, generally informed by the forefront of a field of learning?
- Has the candidate demonstrated a range of standard and specialised research or equivalent tools and techniques of enquiry?
- Was appropriate methodology adopted?
- Has the candidate demonstrated that they can select from complex and advanced skills across a field of learning and developed new skills to a high level, including novel and emerging techniques? If a new methodology has been developed, has it been tested and validated appropriately?
- Has the candidate demonstrated an ability to integrate knowledge, handle complexity to inform judgements?
- Is the candidate familiar with other published work in the field and can the candidate summarise the work of other authors so as to synthesise an appropriate theoretical framework for the work described in the thesis?
- If relevant, were all ethical requirements met?
- Are results interpreted appropriately? Are reasonable conclusions reached based on the evidence presented in the thesis? If relevant, have appropriate statistical methods been employed? Does the candidate appreciate the significance of the results and do conclusions reached take into account relevant published findings by other authors?

Presentation of the thesis:

- Is the thesis presented in a style appropriate to the discipline, and with a minimum of typographical and grammatical errors?
- Are results presented appropriately and in a clear and accessible way? Are all tables, figures and plates, where included, adequately annotated and correctly referenced in the text?
- Is the bibliography complete, comprehensive and up-to-date? Is it referenced appropriately in the text with a recognised citation style?
- Is the thesis accompanied by an acceptable abstract which accurately summarises the work described therein?
- Where the candidate worked as part of a research team, does the thesis clearly identify the individual contribution of the candidate to the overall research project?

6.2 The supervisor may be invited by the Examiners to clarify any issues identified during their consideration of the thesis and, if necessary, bring to the attention of the Examiners any additional information which may be relevant (e.g., the nature of decisions taken at intermediate stages in the research programme). The Examiners must ensure that they have all the information they need on which to base their judgement.

6.3 The Internal Examiner shall ensure that the Examiners consult with each other. Once the Examiners are satisfied that there are no other issues they should take into consideration the Examiners shall prepare a written report on the thesis. Where the Examiners are in agreement, the Internal Examiner shall submit a joint report to the Graduate Studies Office for consideration by the Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee. Where the Examiners are not in agreement, the Internal Examiner shall ensure that separate reports are made and submitted to the Graduate Studies Office for consideration by the Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee.

6.4 The Examination Board must recommend one of the following results:

- (1) Award, no amendments needed (the degree is awarded without any changes to the thesis)
- (2) Award, on condition minor amendments are carried out - this includes minor recommendations that do not significantly affect the argument and/or conclusions of the thesis (such as typographical errors, minor changes in phraseology, inclusion of additional minor points of discussion, or correction or updating of the bibliography). These amendments should be verified to the Graduate Studies Office by the Internal Examiner in writing and should generally be completed within 3 months of the Examination. The supervisor will play a supporting role in ensuring that this process is brought to completion. In the case of theses for which a grade is awarded, the grade will be recommended by the Examiners on the basis of the original submitted thesis.
- (3) Award, on condition major amendments are carried out - the thesis requires substantial modification including rewriting of parts of chapters or sections of the thesis, introduction of new material, further experiments or calculations, analysis or data. These amendments should be verified to the Graduate Studies Office by the Examiners in writing, when submitting a corrected hard-bound copy of the thesis, and approved by the Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee, and should generally be completed within 6 months of the Examination. In the case of theses for which a grade is awarded, the grade which will be recorded for a thesis sent for major revisions, following review and acceptance of the changes by the Examiners, is a Pass, unless the Examiners are of the opinion that a higher class of award is warranted. In such circumstances a reasoned case should be made on the joint report which will be considered by Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee. On consideration of a resubmitted revised thesis, such a judgement may be changed to one of the 'Reject' judgements below where the all examiners determine that the amendments which were originally required have not been carried out to their satisfaction within a reasonable time-frame.
- (4) Reject, but permit the submission of a revised thesis, i.e., a major rewrite of all or a significant part of the thesis, leading to a new thesis being submitted to the Graduate Studies Office for examination. This may include substantial rewriting of parts of the thesis, including introduction of new research and appropriate correction of an inherently flawed and unsound argument or

methodology. The modification(s) would normally be so great as to require re-examination. If the candidate is not capable, in the opinion of the Examiners, of carrying out such a significant revision of the thesis, then option (5) below is preferable. This process should normally be completed within 12 months of the Examination during which time the candidate must be registered as a Masters student, and the revised thesis should be resubmitted to the Graduate Studies Office. In the case of theses for which a grade is awarded, the grade which will be recorded for a thesis rejected and resubmitted, following acceptance of the changes by the Examiners, is Pass.

(5) Reject. No degree is awarded as the thesis is very seriously and inherently deficient. In this case the Examiners must be of the opinion that the deficiencies of the thesis are such that it is reasonable to suppose that the candidate will not be in a position to bring it up to the appropriate standard within a reasonable time. Examiners should be convinced that this is the only decision open to them.

6.5 The Examiners will also recommend grade of honours (First, Second and Pass, if required for certain Masters qualifications, which will be indicated on the examination form) and will be allocated with reference to grade descriptors as shown in the Appendix below and [Marks and Standards](#) for the qualification in question.

6.6 Reports submitted to the Graduate Studies Office for consideration by the Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee should:

- give an indication of the content of the thesis, its contribution to knowledge and the quality of its presentation;
- indicate, where appropriate, the nature and extent of any amendments that are required to the thesis;
- clearly identify one of the available options in terms of results, e.g. no amendments, minor amendments, major amendments etc, and provide a grade if required;
- be typed;
- typically be around 500 words in length;
- be sufficiently clear and informative to allow Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee to make a recommendation to Academic Board;
- be written in English, or accompanied by an English translation
- be signed by all the Examiners.

6.7 The Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee has delegated authority to approve Examiners' report and recommend the conferral of research degrees to Academic Board. The Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee may refer back to the Examiners if the information given is not sufficiently complete to enable the Committee to reach a decision on the recommendation of the Examiners, or if any of the required elements in the report (e.g. a formal indication of a result, an Examiner's signature) is missing. If the report does not justify the recommendation made, the

Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee may recommend an alternative judgement to the Examiners.

6.8 The Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee makes a recommendation to the Academic Board of UCC as to the award of the degree or otherwise. The candidate will be notified in writing of the result after consideration by Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee, subject to final approval by Academic Board.

6.9 The supervisor is responsible for overseeing the amendments or alterations required by the Examiners. The award of the degree will not be made until all amendments have been made to the satisfaction of the Internal Examiner and, if required (as in the case of major amendments), the Internal and External Examiners.

6.10 Once the amendments have been carried out, the student submits a final hardbound thesis to the Graduate Studies Office, accompanied by written confirmation by the Examiner(s) that the required changes have been made.

6.11 A Memory Stick containing an abstract/summary of the thesis (which is used by the Library for cataloguing the thesis) should accompany the hardbound thesis. The thesis will then be lodged in the University library.

6.12 Once the corrected hardbound has been submitted to the Graduate Studies Office the student is then eligible to graduate at the next conferring ceremony.

6.13 Appeals. Candidates may appeal a result by following the procedures of the University (<https://www.ucc.ie/en/study/postgrad/currentresearchstudents/guidelines/>)

Appendix

Grade descriptors for Research Masters theses for which an

Honours grade is recommended

The following grade descriptors will apply to all Research Masters programmes for which a differentiated award is given (i.e., those which had previously given a percentage mark, but which have been now agreed to use an honours band system).

First Class Honours

Excellent performance, engaging closely and systematically with a clear research question or questions, with strong evidence of the following:

- A comprehensive mastery of the subject matter, reflecting deep and broad knowledge and understanding as well as extensive reading, ably supported by evidence and relevant citation;
- An excellent ability to organise, analyse and express arguments fluently and lucidly with a high level of critical analysis;
- A highly-developed capacity for original, creative and logical thinking.

Second Class Honours

Very good performance, engaging substantially with the research question or questions, and demonstrating some or all of the following:

- A strong grasp of the subject matter, well supported by evidence and relevant citation;
- A well-developed capacity to analyse issues, organise material, present arguments clearly and cogently;
- Some original insights and capacity for creative and logical thinking.

Pass

Satisfactory performance – an intellectually adequate thesis with evidence of familiarity with the relevant primary and secondary sources, but suffering from some or all of the following defects:

- A basic grasp of the subject matter, but somewhat lacking in focus and structure • Main points covered in thesis, but lacking detail
- Some effort to engage, but only a basic understanding of the topic portrayed • Limited development of argument
- Only some critical awareness displayed
- Insufficient evidence or relevant citation included 14
- Appearance of errors, though not on a scale indicating a Fail judgment

- Lacking evidence of capacity for original and logical thinking
- Poor use of language
- Sub-standard level of citation