Research Degrees Examination Board

Method of Working:

1.0 Meetings

1.1 There shall normally be six ordinary meetings of the Research Degrees Examination Board (RDEB) (the Board) in each session which will be held on the dates shown on the Examinations Office (EO) website.

2.0 Consideration of Reports from Plagiarism Panels

2.1 The Board will receive reports from Plagiarism Panels, set up to consider allegations of plagiarism made on submission of research degrees, or in response to concerns raised by examiners.

2.2 The Board will consider the panel’s recommendations and decide on an appropriate course of action.

3.0 Receipt of Examiners’ Reports and other papers

3.1 All Reports (including Independent Chair’s reports) and additional papers to be considered at RDEB must be received in the EO by the published deadline date, normally two weeks in advance of the respective RDEB date. RDEB dates and their deadlines will be published on the EO website: www.bristol.ac.uk/exams/

3.2 Papers will be sent to all RDEB members at least one working week in advance of the RDEB date.

3.3 Updated information (including addenda, written confirmation of errors having been completed and revised reports) will be submitted as tabled papers at RDEB at the discretion of the Board secretary.

3.4 Reports submitted after the deadline will only be considered in exceptional circumstances, at the request of the appropriate Graduate Dean and with the permission of the Chair of the Board.

3.5 At the last meeting of the RDEB immediately preceding a Degree Congregation, written confirmation regarding outstanding ‘Errors of Substance’ received between the deadline date for papers and the RDEB date will be included as tabled papers, providing the RDEB has considered the initial Examiners’ Report at a previous meeting.

4.0 The Examiners’ Report Form

4.1 The RDEB requires that the Examiners’ Report forms:

   4.1.1 will be presented in typescript.
   4.1.2 will be signed (either by hand or electronically) by all Examiners and the Head of School or other nominated person.
   4.1.3 will be countersigned (either by hand or electronically) by a Deputy Head of School or other senior departmental officer, where the Head of School is also acting as Supervisor or Internal Examiner to the candidate.
   4.1.4 will contain sufficient detail regarding the thesis and the oral examination to enable the Board to make an informed decision.
   4.1.5 will have, in the case of errors of substance, either in the body of the report or as an attachment, sufficient detail to convey to the Board and the candidate, the requirements of the examiners to bring the work up to the required standard.

4.2 If the Postgraduate Examinations Administrator has any concerns regarding the Report Forms, such as missing or incomplete sections or signatures, the EO will contact relevant staff in advance of a Board to resolve the issues.
5.0 Examiners’ Recommendations

5.1 The RDEB will consider carefully any recommendation from the Examiners before making any decision. A recommendation that a candidate will be required to resubmit a doctoral thesis for consideration only for the lower award of Masters, or that a degree of Master be awarded, as an outcome from a first doctoral examination submission should be considered unusual and would need due justification by the examiners. A Masters degree should not be awarded as a ‘consolation prize’ for a failed doctoral degree, but should only be awarded where the relevant academic criteria are met.

6.0 Chair’s Powers

The Chair may, if authorised by the Board or if the matter is urgent, make decisions in between meetings on behalf of the Board. All such decisions will be reported to the next meeting of the Board.

7.0 Award outcomes from the Board

7.1 (A) Unconditional Award – The candidate is e-mailed regarding the award and sent a Letter of Certification from the EO confirming the award, and can proceed to graduation.

7.2 (B) Awarded subject to the correction of Minor Errors – The candidate is e-mailed regarding the award and sent a Letter of Certification from the EO confirming the award, together with a letter asking that the minor errors be corrected within 28 days of the date of the letter. The candidate’s Internal Examiner is also sent a letter asking for written or e-mailed confirmation when the errors have been corrected. The candidate can proceed to graduation.

7.3 (C) Errors of Substance – The candidate is sent a letter stating that corrections are required and giving a date by which they must be completed; normally six months from the date of the letter. A copy of the examiners’ reports and any further information provided by them will be enclosed. The letter is copied to Supervisor and Internal Examiner, and the letter, with reports, e-mailed to the candidate’s bristol.ac.uk e-mail address. The candidate will not receive an award until written confirmation from her examiner(s) that the errors have been rectified has been considered by a future Board.

7.4 (D) or (G) Permitted to Re-submit or Permitted to Re-submit for Masters - The candidate is sent a letter stating that a resubmission is required and giving a date by which the work must be resubmitted to the EO; normally twelve months from the date of the letter. A copy of the examiners’ reports and any further information provided by them will be enclosed. The letter is copied to Supervisor and Internal Examiner, and the letter, with reports, e-mailed to the candidate’s bristol.ac.uk e-mail address. Following re-submission of work, the candidate will be re-examined, normally by the original examiners. All Award outcomes, other than a further resubmission, are available to the Examiners following a re-submission. A re-examination fee is payable by the candidate on re-submission.

7.5 (E) or (F) Award of a lower degree to doctoral candidates or award of a lower degree subject to the correction of minor errors - The candidate is e-mailed regarding the award and sent a Letter of Certification confirming the award and can proceed to graduation. A letter referencing the appeal process is also enclosed.

7.6 (H) Fail – The candidate is sent a letter confirming the fail. A letter referencing the appeal process is also enclosed. It is highly unusual for a research degree candidate to have progressed as far as the examination stage and to subsequently fail. Therefore, the Board would normally ask the relevant Graduate Dean to investigate further to ensure that the University had provided adequate support and guidance to the candidate for the duration of the period of registration.

8.0 Deadlines for receipt of resubmissions and corrected work

8.1 Resubmitted theses should be submitted by the candidate to the EO by the agreed deadline as determined by the Board. If a Resubmission is not received by the due date, the Internal Examiner and Supervisor will be contacted by the EO and asked to provide an update on progress and, if necessary, asked to contact the candidate and encourage them to apply in writing for an extension of time which will then be considered by the Board.
8.2 Candidates are required to submit their corrected ‘errors of substance’ directly to the Examiner(s). The Examiners are then required to write to the EO and confirm that the errors have been corrected. This should normally be done within one month of the given deadline, otherwise the Internal Examiner will be contacted by the EO to establish whether it is the corrections or the ‘sign-off’ that is outstanding. If the former, the Supervisor will be contacted by the EO and asked to provide an update on progress and, if necessary, asked to contact the candidate and encourage them to apply in writing for an extension of time which will then be considered by the Board.

9.0 Extension of time to enable the candidate to correct Errors or to complete a Resubmission

9.1 Requests for an extension should be made in writing by the candidate and sent to the EO to be considered by the appropriate Graduate Dean or the Board. The candidate must explain in sufficient detail why the request for an extension has become necessary and the date by which the candidate expects to complete the work.

9.2 For a first extension to the time allowed for Errors of Substance, permission will be given by the appropriate Graduate Dean. Where any extension will take the total time allowed for correction of errors, or for resubmission to more than one year, permission will normally be considered by the Board.

9.3 Where a candidate presents corrected work after the due date without having asked for an extension, or where a granted extension has expired, the relevant Graduate Dean will be required to provide an adequate explanation of the circumstances to the Board before any award can be made

10.0 Deemed to have withdrawn

10.1 Where a candidate has exceeded the time allowed for correction of errors of substance or for resubmission and has not maintained contact with the University the EO will check with Supervisor and Internal Examiner whether they have been in contact and if corrected work is expected

10.2 The EO will refer such cases to the Board for consideration and include any correspondence received from the candidate, supervisor or internal examiner. The Board will consider any requests for an extension and normally, if further time is granted, this will be considered to be a final deadline. Candidates who fail to meet a final deadline or who have not maintained contact with the University will be deemed to have withdrawn.

11.0 Outstanding University and/or Examiners Requirements

11.1 Awards are made by the Board irrespective of whether candidates have outstanding tuition fee or bench fee debts. Awards made to debtors will stand and can be verified at any time by EO.

11.2 Tuition fee or bench fee debts will exclude the candidate from having their degree conferred. Following written confirmation from the University Finance Office to the EO that outstanding debts have been paid, the candidate may proceed to graduation.

11.3 Where the candidate has minor errors to complete or has completed them but written confirmation of their completion by their internal examiner has not been received in the EO, the candidate may still proceed to graduation but will have their degree certificate withheld until the matter has been resolved.

11.4 Where the candidate has not submitted a hardbound copy of their thesis to the EO, the degree certificate will be withheld until the matter has been resolved.

12.0 Confirmation of Award and Degree Certificates

12.1 Candidates who attend a Graduation ceremony will have their degrees conferred and will receive their degree certificate at the ceremony (or posted to the candidates home address as registered in the SITS Central Student Records System shortly after the congregation if the Degree has been awarded in absentia) provided that all outstanding University and Examiners requirements have been completed.

12.2 Withheld certificates are kept securely by the EO and will be released to candidates upon completion of all outstanding requirements.

Robert Heron – 08 January 2016