

Research Degrees: Guidance notes series

3. ADMISSIONS & REGISTRATION

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Key words: admissions, entry criteria, 'how to apply', offer letter, fees, registration, Home Office, suspension, extension, writing-up fees

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Related document	Policy 2Q: Admission, supervision and monitoring of research students Policy 2J: Admissions Policy 4L: Procedure relating to the Academic Misconduct in Postgraduate Research Degrees 4Q: Transfer to writing up status procedure Research Degree (RD) forms, available on the Portal
Further reading	How to apply http://www.solent.ac.uk/research/postgraduate-research/how-to-apply/how-to-apply.aspx International support at Southampton Solent University http://portal.solent.ac.uk/support/international-support/international-support.aspx Intellectual Property Rights at Southampton Solent University http://portal.solent.ac.uk/support/support-with-research/intellectual-property-rights/intellectual-property-rights.aspx
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RESEARCH DEGREE ADMISSIONS

General principles

1. Decisions to admit a student to study for a research degree (MPhil or PhD) must be taken in accordance with the University Policy 2Q. Graduate Studies handle all matters relating to admissions in liaison with the Hub Postgraduate Research Coordinator. Applications are reviewed by the Hub Scrutiny Panel. All written communications with the prospective student should be directed through Graduate Studies in order for a comprehensive file and audit trail to be kept. Offers of places are only made from Graduate Studies once a written instruction signed by the Hub Postgraduate Research Coordinator, or nominee, is received.
2. A key part of the application review process, is to determine whether the University is able to offer the appropriate supervisory expertise. The non-availability of expert supervision is an acceptable reason for rejecting an application, however eligible the applicant is in other respects.
3. Permission to present a thesis in another language should normally be sought at the time of application for registration from the Chair of the Research Degree Committee. Permission to present a thesis in a language other than English will normally only be given if the subject matter of the thesis involves language and related studies.
4. An offer to study for a research degree is only valid for a limited period of time, normally six months. If an applicant wishes to defer the start of their study, they do this in the knowledge that the University may not be in a position to offer a place to study at a later stage.
5. Application for confidentiality will normally only be approved in order to enable a patent application to be lodged or to protect commercially or politically sensitive material. A thesis should not be restricted in this way in order to protect research leads. Approval is given by the Hub Scrutiny Panel. The normal maximum period of confidentiality is two years. The Hub Scrutiny Panel will not automatically grant confidentiality for two years. In exceptional circumstances the Hub Scrutiny Panel may approve a longer period after consulting with the Intellectual Property Advisory Panel (intellectual.property@solent.ac.uk).
6. Except where permission has been given for the thesis and the oral examination to be in another language, the Hub Scrutiny Panel must satisfy itself that the student has sufficient command of the English language to complete satisfactorily the programme of work and to prepare and defend a thesis in English.

Entry criteria

7. Applicants for admission to read for a research degree should normally hold a first or second class honours degree from a UK University or a qualification of equivalence to such an honours degree.
8. Applicants not meeting the 'certificated' requirements set out above may be considered on their merits and in relation to the nature and scope of the programme of the work proposed. In considering an applicant in this category, the Hub Scrutiny Panel will look for evidence of the candidate's ability and background knowledge in relation to the proposed research. Professional experience, publications, written reports or other appropriate evidence of accomplishment may be taken into consideration.
9. Any student for whom English is not a first language should, before being offered a place, have achieved an overall IELTS (International English Language Testing System) score of 6.5 with minimum sub-scores of 6.0 in all component sections (writing, reading, listening and speaking) or an overall TOEFL score of 560 (paper-based), 220 (computer-based) or 94-95 (internet-based - IBT) with a minimum score of 22 in each of the four component sections (writing, reading, listening and speaking). Students who have studied a first degree or higher degree and answered their examinations in English will be exempt.

Mode of Study and Paid Work

10. Applicants may apply for full-time or part-time registration.
11. A full-time student should normally devote on average at least 35 hours per week to the research and may undertake a small amount of paid work, either in term time or in the holidays, provided that it is compatible with the student's full-time studies and that the total demand on the student's time is no more than six hours per week. The Director of Studies will normally agree in writing to this commitment.
12. A part-time student should normally devote on average at least 17.5 hours per week to the research.

How to apply

13. Applicants for admission to candidature for a research degree will normally provide the following in an email Graduate Studies (research.admissions@solent.ac.uk):
- a) Relevant application form duly completed and signed;
 - b) Research proposal (approx. 1000 words) detailing:
 - The subject you wish to research
 - Why it is of interest to you
 - How you propose to carry out your research
 - How your proposed project relates to other work in the field
 - How you think your project might contribute to the understanding of your subject
 - c) Evidence of relevant qualification(s);
 - d) Two references (at least one should normally be academic);
 - e) Evidence of level of English (where appropriate); and
 - f) Adequate proof of identity.
14. Applicants from certain countries may be required, under Home Office Policy, to pay a deposit at offer stage in order to be granted a visa for entry.

Interview

15. Before an offer of a place is made, applicants are normally interviewed by the Hub Postgraduate Research Coordinator and the potential Director of Studies (or nominee).
16. A telephone, or video interview (i.e. via Skype™ or ‘Google+ Hangouts’) with the candidate may be arranged for international and/or distant applicants. The interview should cover the following points:
- a) The previous educational, research and relevant occupational experience of the applicant;
 - b) Their previous research training and its compliance with the University requirements;
 - c) Any gaps in skills needed to undertake the proposed research degree;
 - d) Their understanding of the research degree process and their motivation to undertake a research degree;
 - e) Funding and resourcing of the studies and the proposed project.

Distance learning students

17. Applicants may on a very exceptional basis be permitted to study for an MPhil or PhD if they are preparing to work outside of the UK. This can only occur if clear arrangements are agreed prior to the commencement of the project between the students and the Hub Postgraduate Research Coordinator and Chair of Research Degrees Committee to ensure that they will receive the supervision needed, and that they can benefit from all the resources needed to complete their research and write their thesis satisfactorily. These arrangements will include the use of email and video conferencing for supervisory and review meetings, together with the use of the library e-resources.
18. Students who undertake work for their research degrees abroad must spend at least six weeks per year (if they are a full-time student) or three weeks per year (if they are a part-time student) at Southampton Solent University, so that they can establish personal relationships with supervisors. International students unable to spend the prescribed period of time at the University will not be permitted to study by distance learning. All International students must comply with the relevant Home Office visa requirements during their studies.
19. It is obvious that students studying by distance learning cannot avail themselves of some of the procedures described in the documents relating to research degree provision. The Hub Postgraduate Research Coordinator is therefore asked to discuss alternative arrangements with Graduate Studies in good time, as students approach key milestones.

Constituting the supervisory team

20. The supervisory team must be constituted in line with the University’s Policy 2Q and the guidelines for the selection of research degree supervisors below, which are intended to provide the minimum requirements for supervisors and should be applied by the Hub Postgraduate Research Coordinator before allocating research supervisory teams.

Key principles (2Q.8 refers)

21. Research degree students should have at least two and normally not more than three supervisors. There should always be one supervisor who is a member of the University's academic staff. One team member is designated as the Director of Studies, with the responsibility to supervise the student on a regular and frequent basis. Where a University supervisor leaves the University at a point where this would disadvantage the student, the supervisor may be asked to continue.

Eligibility criteria

22. Supervisory team should have experience of supervising at least two students to the successful completion of a UK doctoral level degree or equivalent international qualification. Supervisors should be on a supervisory team for at least two years prior to thesis submission before claiming a completion. They must also have relevant and recent research expertise in the proposed topic area of the thesis.
23. The Director of Studies is able and available to meet on a regular and frequent basis and he/she must be an internal member of the University.
24. No supervisor should have any conflict of interest with the research degree student
25. Occasionally, exceptions may arise where it is regarded sensible to appoint a supervisor who does not meet all these criteria. In such instances, a case may be made to the Chair of the Research Degrees Committee for an exception to be allowed.

Internal supervisor

26. In addition, eligible internal supervisors should:
- demonstrate clear evidence of research competence;
 - hold a contract of employment as a member of staff of Southampton Solent University;
 - have undertaken relevant training regarding supervision and University-specific policies and procedures/or undertake such training within twelve months of being appointed research student supervisor.

External supervisor

27. Eligible external and/or industry supervisors should:
- be aware of the nature and purpose of the degree on which the student is registered;
 - possess specialist knowledge and expertise in the subject of research and/or demonstrate clear evidence of research competence;
 - have sufficient and relevant industry experience (where relevant).
28. External supervisors should only be used when there is a strong rationale for doing so.

Approval of applications for admission to read for a research degree

29. Applications for admission will be considered by the relevant Hub Scrutiny Panel. Responsibility for the admission of students to a research degree lies with its Chair, the Hub Postgraduate Research Coordinator.
30. Admissions decisions should always involve more than two members of the Hub Scrutiny Panel. Normally, the Hub Postgraduate Research Coordinator and at least two other members of the Panel will be involved in the decision.
31. The Hub Scrutiny Panel is responsible for checking the research proposals for plagiarism.
32. The Hub Scrutiny Panel may approve an application from an individual proposing to work outside the UK, provided that:
- a) there is satisfactory evidence as to the facilities available for the research both in the University and abroad; and
 - b) the arrangements proposed for supervision enable frequent and substantial contact between the student and the supervisor(s) based in the UK, including adequate face-to-face contact with the

supervisor(s). A full-time student should normally spend not less than an average of six weeks per year at the University; a part-time student should normally spend not less than an average of three weeks per year at the University.

33. The Hub Scrutiny Panel must be satisfied that appropriate arrangements are in place for high quality remote supervision utilising technologies such as video-calls (i.e. via Skype™ or ‘Google+ Hangouts’). Such arrangements must be carefully scrutinised and reviewed during each annual monitoring cycle and the student must be informed, at the point of admission, that the University reserves the right to enforce the attendance requirements where there are reasonable doubts about the efficacy of the remote arrangements.
34. Offers of admission must be formally approved by the Hub Postgraduate Research Coordinator, or a nominee, who will satisfy himself/herself that:
 - a) the research proposal has not been plagiarised;
 - b) there is a clear written statement of the field of research;
 - c) the source of funding has been confirmed;
 - d) the supervisory team and other resources are in place to meet the needs of the student;
 - e) the applicant is suitably qualified to undertake the proposed research programme (Graduate Studies will ensure that the evidence provided is checked);
 - f) the applicant has the necessary time and commitment to undertake postgraduate work;
 - g) the research training needs of the applicant have been identified, set out clearly in writing and agreed with them;
 - h) any particular specialist needs have been identified and agreed
 - i) the applicant has suitable command of the English language (Graduate Studies will ensure that the evidence provided is checked);
 - j) the applicant is embarking on research in a field that will yield a viable research project and for which expert supervision is available;
 - k) the proposed research project can be completed in the prescribed period allowed;
 - l) there has been appropriate provisional allocation of Director of Studies and co-supervisor(s);
 - m) suitable facilities are available for conduct of the research (e.g. computing, desk space, technical assistance);
 - n) in case of full-time students, the applicant has access to financial support to enable them to undertake their studies for the duration of the programme;
35. The Hub Postgraduate Research Coordinator (or nominee) confirms in writing to Graduate Studies that an offer of a place on a research degree programme can be made to the applicant, normally within eight weeks from receipt of the full application pack.
36. The offer letter is issued by Graduate Studies and contains the following information:
 - a) the mode of study (full-time or part-time)
 - b) the expected total annual fees, and other relevant financial matters
 - c) confirmation of the nature of the proposed research project
 - d) type of programme, normally students are registered initially for an MPhil with the possibility to transfer to a PhD upon successful completion of their transfer
 - e) the expected period of study for which the applicant is invited to register
 - f) supervision arrangements (Names of the Director of Studies and co-supervisor(s). To this end the Director of School and Chair of Research Degrees Committee will have confirmed in writing the supervisory appointment)
 - g) proposed start date
 - h) the requirements placed by the University on the applicant (for example engaging in training on research methods, progress reports and minimum contact with supervisors)
 - i) arrangements for registration

- j) how to find the relevant policies, and research degree related information.
- k) the responsibilities of the applicant for his or her academic studies and the expectations placed by the University upon its students
- l) any relevant conditions attached to the offer (where applicable)
- m) the date by which the candidate should confirm (or otherwise) acceptance of the offer

37. Once admission has been approved, the applicant will be registered for one of the following:

- Master of Philosophy (MPhil) - with possibility of transfer to Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
- Doctor of Philosophy - direct (PhD)

38. The University encourages the provision of constructive feedback to unsuccessful candidates and students may appeal the decision in accordance with the University Admissions Policy.

Registration

39. Students must register online with the University at the beginning of their candidature. Students register online on an annual basis at the start of each subsequent academic session, within the prescribed registration period allowed and until submission of the thesis.

40. At the time of registration, students must pay such fees as may be determined by the University. Students are fully registered only after the payment of the appropriate fee.

41. Re-registration should normally have been completed by the commencement of each academic session. Students who do not re-register within a short period after the commencement of the academic session will be withdrawn. They will not be eligible for supervision and will not be able to use University resources or facilities.

The registration period

42. The minimum and maximum periods of registrations are as follows:

MPhil	Minimum	Maximum
Full-time	18 months	36 months
Part-time	30 months	72 months
PhD (via transfer from MPhil enrolment & including that period of MPhil enrolment)	Minimum	Maximum
Full-time	24 months	48 months
Part-time	48 months	96 months
PhD (direct)	Minimum	Maximum
Full-time	24 months	48 months
Part-time	48 months	96 months

43. For the purposes of calculating maximum and minimum periods of registration, a student's registration is deemed to run from the date on which they commence their studies.

44. Postgraduate research degree students must have their research project approved by the Research Degrees Committee, normally within six months of registration for full-time students and twelve months for part-time students. Where a project proposal is not approved, the student will be given an opportunity to resubmit their proposal. If, after the student has been given this opportunity, the proposal remains unsatisfactory, the Research Degrees Committee will normally withdraw registration.

45. Students registered on an MPhil with possibility to transfer to PhD, are expected to transfer from MPhil to PhD, normally after at least 12 months of full-time study and before 18 months (24-36 months for part-time study).

46. Students are expected to have written up their research by the end of the maximum period of registration allowed.

Writing-up fees

47. Postgraduate research students who have completed their programme of research for an MPhil or PhD and are in the final stages of 'writing-up', requiring no further supervision prior to the submission of their thesis, may be allowed to transfer to 'writing-up' status (4Q: Procedure for transfer to writing up fee status). The 'writing-up' status grants students a reduction in fees for the 'writing-up fee' period. If the student subsequently fails to submit within the 'writing-up' period and wishes to continue their registration, they will be required to pay an appropriate fee, calculated pro-rata for the extended period until submission of the thesis/work.

Training

48. Postgraduate research students are normally required to follow a programme of related studies approved or specified by the Hub Scrutiny Panel as identified by the training needs analysis. This should be designed to ensure competence in research methods and/or knowledge related to the subject of the thesis. During their first year of registration all research degree students are registered on the Postgraduate Certificate in Research and are expected to attend and achieve the award. Only those students who can effectively demonstrate and evidence that they have already achieved the learning outcomes will be exempt. Section 4Q of the Academic Handbook details the procedure to be used by PGR students, Directors of Study and Hub Postgraduate Research Coordinators in applying to exempt students from the Postgraduate Certificate in Research course. If the student is registered on the PgC and fulfils all of its requirements, he/she may be recommended for that award in addition to the degree of MPhil or PhD.
49. Where appropriate, postgraduate research students may be encouraged to attend taught classes at undergraduate or postgraduate level. Such a programme of study should not occupy more than one third of the total period of registration and should complement the research. Attendance to these classes will be subject to availability and School approval.

Changing mode

50. Where a student transfers from part-time to full-time registration, for purposes of calculation of the minimum or maximum permitted periods, the equivalent period of full-time registration will be considered to be half that of the actual part-time period of registration, and the full-time periods shown in the above table.
51. Where a student has completed up to 24 months of full-time registration, he/she may change to part-time registration, when for purposes of calculation of the minimum or maximum permitted periods, the equivalent period of part-time registration will be considered twice that of the actual full-time period of registration, and the part-time periods given in the above table.
52. These rules apply on the same pro-rata basis to MPhil registrations.

Suspension

53. The registration period cannot be suspended for failure to re-register or non-payment of fees.
54. Students are normally expected to pursue their research on a continuous basis for the stipulated duration of their programme. However, where the student is prevented by ill-health or cause beyond their control, from making progress with the research, the registration may be suspended by the Research Degrees Committee for a period of not less than a month and not more than a year at a time. Appropriate medical evidence will be required to support requests for suspension on health grounds.
55. Retrospective suspension of registration will not normally be granted for more than three months.
56. Students wishing to interrupt their studies are advised to discuss reasons for suspension with their Director of Studies in the first instance.
57. Following agreement on the appropriate length of interruption, the candidate and his/her supervision team must apply to the Research Degrees Committee for a suspension of research degree registration using the relevant form (RD5S).
58. It is important to note that if the student applies to Graduate Studies to suspend their Postgraduate Certificate in Research registration, suspension will only be approved for the PG Certificate but not for the research degree programme. Hence a separate application needs to be submitted to Graduate Studies to suspend their research degree registration. Equally, an application to suspend a research degree registration does not apply to the PG Certificate registration.

59. Articulating reasons for suspension can be complex hence students seeking to suspend are advised to discuss these with their supervision team and/or Graduate Studies before the application is endorsed by the Hub Postgraduate Research Coordinator.
60. Once approved by the supervision team, the completed and duly signed form must be sent to Graduate Studies for approval by the Research Degrees Committee. Applications for suspension will be reviewed by a Sub-Committee of the Research Degrees Committee, usually involving the Chair and Deputy-Chair of the Research Degrees Committee. A decision will normally be reached within ten working days of application. A written confirmation will then be issued to the student.
61. All applications will be considered on an individual basis and a case must be made by the student and supported by his/her supervision team. Approval may not automatically be granted.
62. If a suspension is approved, fees may still be payable for the suspended period. Students are advised to seek advice from the University Income Team Manager, Robert Ernsberger (rob.ernsberger@solent.ac.uk), regarding this matter.
63. The University will inform the Home Office of all suspended international students holding a Tier 4 visa. For further information on Tier 4 Policy, visit the Southampton Solent University's International Team pages on the Portal. You may also contact internationalsupport@solent.ac.uk for further information.
64. It is recommended that students who are considering suspending their registrations and have concerns about the impact of suspending might have on their visas, seek further guidance and support from the International Support Team.

Early submission

65. A student who has made unusually rapid progress with a programme of research may apply to the Research Degrees Committee for permission, exceptionally, to submit a thesis in advance of the minimum period of registration set out.

Extension

66. The University is aware of the uncertain nature of research, and is prepared to act with sensible flexibility in extending the registration period. The Research Degrees Committee may, because of circumstances beyond a student's control, exceptionally extend a student's period of registration beyond the permitted maximum, normally for not more than one year.
67. A student seeking to extend their registration period should apply at least six months prior to the end of the registration period.
68. Students should be aware that taking up a full-time job before they have submitted their thesis, will not be acceptable circumstances justifying an extension to registration, however demanding the job may be.
69. Where a candidate has not presented their work within the specified registration period, they will be required to seek an extension to registration to be permitted to submit beyond the end of their registration period.
70. A student seeking an extension to registration must apply on the appropriate form (RD5E). The RD5E will need to be signed by the student, the Director of Studies, endorsed by the Hub Postgraduate Research Coordinator and sent to Graduate Studies.
71. Students who are permitted to extend their period of registration will be required to pay an appropriate fee, calculated pro-rata for the extended period. If a writing-up fee applies, the fee calculated on a pro-rata basis shall not be continued for any approved extended period of registration.
72. Any changes in registration for a student studying on a Tier 4 visa may affect their residential status within the UK. Students should seek further advice from the International support team located in the Student Hub (internationalsupport@solent.ac.uk).

Withdrawal/termination of registration

73. Where a student has discontinued their programme of research, the Hub Postgraduate Research Coordinator will notify Graduate Studies of their withdrawal of registration using the appropriate form (RD7W) in a timely manner.

74. Registration will also be terminated for students who, for example:

- a) do not re-register within a short period after the commencement of the academic session;
- b) do not pay their fee in due course; or
- c) have been found guilty of academic misconduct (Policy 4L: Procedure relating to the Academic Misconduct in Postgraduate Research Degrees refers)

Appeals

75. A candidate may make a formal appeal to the Head of Student Achievement, Academic Services, to request reconsideration of a registration issue, excluding termination of registration due to non-payment of fees.