



Guidance on the award of a Posthumous PhD degree

Background

UCL has awarded posthumous PhD degrees to a small number of students since 2010. The procedure used is based on guidance provided by Durham University. This guidance is intended to fit with UCL's processes. It may be adapted to fit other research or doctoral candidates. If the award to be considered includes taught modules, the relevant Exam Board will need to provide guidance before the thesis examination goes forward.

Rationale for Draft Process

1. UCL has the power to consider the award of posthumous aegrotat degrees to taught students who have not met the full requirements for award. The recommendations below are intended to ensure that any posthumous PhD award is made after consideration by two examiners in order to reflect the standards set for all such awards.
2. Posthumous awards will be rare and each circumstance will be unique. A candidate could be between examination and resubmission, at the point of submission, writing up or still undertaking supervised research. The state of the thesis will therefore vary extensively. These process notes are intended to serve as guidance rather than formal policy.

Initial Assessment of Thesis-Equivalent

3. The starting point for any posthumous PhD will need to be an assessment of the information is available for examination, in the context of the criteria for award of a PhD (or other research qualification).
4. Given the criteria, and the normal process for examining a research degree, this assessment needs to consider what is available to represent the thesis (a full or partially complete thesis; any draft thesis chapters; any relating documentation which was to be incorporated into the thesis; any other supporting information eg documents submitted for measuring progress). The only minimum requirement is that the supervisory team and Departmental Graduate Tutor or Faculty Graduate Tutor are satisfied that there is enough to permit a judgement to be made in accordance with the alternate examination as detailed in the process below. Students will have need to have made substantial progress. It is unlikely that a PhD could be examined posthumously if the student was not in at least their final year of supervised study.
5. The supervisor or other departmental contact will need to make a case to the Chair of the Research Degrees Committee for the examination process to go forward. The case

should go via the Research Degrees team in Student and Registry Services and should include all the details of the proposed examination as set out below.

6. The examination process will need to provide some equivalency to the viva. This means that it is always likely that the supervisory team will need to provide some additional information, even if the thesis is complete (to demonstrate, for example, the student's engagement in the field more broadly and therefore their likely understanding of the relationship between it and their work), acting, in part, as a proxy for the student. This additional information may take the form of, or include, examples of work undertaken or conferences and training attended.

Preparation for Examination Process

7. The supervisory team should prepare the thesis-equivalent for examination, as agreed during the initial assessment of the work. The initial amount of additional information provided by a supervisory team for the thesis-equivalent will depend upon the state of the thesis. Where a thesis is partially complete, in draft form, or supported by research articles which would have been incorporated into a final thesis, the supervisory team should be asked to provide linking statements. These should demonstrate how the different aspects of the thesis were expected to fit together. It is difficult to quantify the amount of information necessary in any specific instance, but any linking writing should be clearly indicated as being the work of the supervisors. This mirrors current practice where students are asked at the start of thesis to indicate any aspects of their thesis which have been co-authored.
8. It may be necessary for the supervisory team to provide further information relating to the criteria for the award, to support the thesis-equivalent. This may cover any gaps or lack of clarity and to provide information which would have been forthcoming during a viva.
9. The examination process should involve two examiners, as per any other research degree examination. They will need to be briefed on the specific nature of the posthumous PhD and be willing to act under the circumstances. They should be nominated and appointed after scrutiny by the DGT and FGT in the usual way.

Alternate Examination Process

10. The thesis-equivalent documentation will be sent to the two examiners by the supervisor. They will be asked to complete preliminary reports.
11. The criteria for the award will be the same, though their interpretation will necessarily differ. The clarity of the thesis-equivalent need only be sufficient to permit an examination of it to take place. The questions within the initial report will therefore be as follows:
 - Has the candidate shown that he or she is able to conduct original investigations?
 - Has the candidate shown that he or she is able to test his or her own ideas and those of others?
 - Has the candidate shown that he or she understands how the special theme is related to a wider field of knowledge?
 - Does the thesis contain an original contribution to knowledge? (The thesis should include matter worthy of publication though it need not be submitted in a form suitable for publication).

12. An examination will need to be conducted with a focus on the work that has been done with some consideration as to how it might have developed in its final stages.
13. There can be no viva but examiners will be encouraged to request additional information and/or ask questions of the supervisory team before making a recommendation on the work.
14. The recommendations available to the examiners will be: award of PhD; award of a lower qualification; no award.

Follow up processes for award of the degree

15. Once the examination has taken place, the examiners should submit their report on the outcome of the examination to the Research Degrees office.
16. Before the award is made the supervisor or other department contact should confirm with the candidate's family that they wish the thesis to be made available in UCL's Research Publications Service. If they do, the supervisor should complete the relevant form to allow access, noting that this is a posthumous award and submit the thesis via UCL Discovery.
17. Once these details are confirmed the Research Degrees team will make the award on the student's record. They will print the certificate and pass to the supervisor or other departmental contact to send to the family with a suitable covering letter.