

Policy on Posthumous or Aegrotat Awards for Postgraduate Research Students

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This policy applies to the award of a postgraduate research degree in the event of death, or diagnosed terminal illness of a candidate for a higher degree by research prior to the award of their degree. This policy covers any degree covered by Regulation 1 of the [General Regulations as to Higher Degrees by Research](#).
- 1.2 General enquiries regarding a potential posthumous or aegrotat award should be directed to the appropriate faculty contact in the PGR Support Team in Research Services in the first instance. Contact details are available at: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/rpi/pgr/contacts>.

2. Process for requesting consideration of a posthumous award

- 2.1 Before proceeding with a recommendation for a posthumous award, the relevant academic department must first ensure that they have the support of the deceased candidate's family.
- 2.2 Requests for the award of a posthumous research degree should be initiated by the supervisor, but only in cases where a strong case can be made. Supervisors should not be pressured into making the case for the award of a posthumous degree if there is insufficient work to justify such an award. Where evidence exists to support such a case the supervisor should provide a detailed statement outlining the reasons why the candidate should be considered for the posthumous degree. Any recommendations for a posthumous award must also be endorsed by the Head of Department and the relevant Faculty PGR Lead.
- 2.3 It is expected that the award of a posthumous research degree will be rare. In all cases, the candidate must have completed a significant body of work, sufficient to enable a proper assessment to be made of the candidate's ability to write a thesis of the appropriate standard for the award.
- 2.4 Consideration will be given to the recommendation of a posthumous award in the following circumstances.

3. Following thesis submission, but no examination (or re-examination) has taken place

- 3.1 If the thesis has been submitted, but not yet examined (or re-examined where death occurred while the candidate was undertaking corrections), the thesis should be examined in accordance with normal procedures, as far as possible. The examiners will need to be informed of the circumstances and made aware of the fact that there will be no viva voce examination and no recommendation for substantial amendments can be made that would require a major revision to the thesis. The examiners will consider the thesis and the supervisor's statement in order to determine their recommendation.

- 3.2 For doctoral submissions, the examiners may recommend one of the following options:
- Award the doctoral degree
 - Award the doctoral degree, subject to minor corrections where these can be completed by the supervisor
 - Award the MPhil
 - Award the MPhil, subject to minor corrections where these can be completed by the supervisor
 - No award
- 3.3 For MPhil submissions, the examiners may recommend one of the following options:
- Award the MPhil
 - Award the MPhil, subject to minor corrections where these can be completed by the supervisor
 - No award

4. Following the viva, but before any post-viva corrections could be completed

- 4.1 Depending on the nature and extent of the corrections and how far they had been completed, the examiners will need to assess whether the award of the degree, or a lower qualification, can be recommended. If minor corrections were required, it may be possible for the supervisor to complete these, but this may not be feasible for major corrections and resubmissions; therefore the examiners should be consulted about how to proceed and whether any award can be made.

5. Before the thesis has been submitted for examination - candidate has completed the minimum period of registration

- 5.1 If the candidate has completed the minimum period of registration but has not yet submitted the thesis at the time of death, the supervisor should collate the material produced by the candidate, which demonstrates their performance at a standard equivalent to the requirements of the degree for which they were registered. This would normally include thesis chapters, progress reports, conference papers, work prepared for publications and publications. The supervisor's statement should explain the nature of the submission, outlining where the material produced by the candidate fits into the planned programme of work and why the award of the degree should be recommended. As part of the collation, the supervisor may need to provide some linking statements to explain how the material fits together. Any such links should be clearly indicated as being the work of the supervisor and not the candidate.
- 5.2 The collated material and supporting statement should initially be considered by an independent subject expert, nominated by the Head of Department, whose role will be to determine whether the submission should be sent to examiners for formal consideration.

- 5.3 If the decision is to proceed to examination, internal and external examiners will be appointed. The examiners will be made aware of the circumstances surrounding the submission. The examiners will consider the portfolio of work submitted, along with the supervisor's supporting statement.
- 5.4 For doctoral submissions, the examiners may recommend one of the following options:
- Award the doctoral degree
 - Award the doctoral degree, subject to minor corrections where these can be completed by the supervisor
 - Award the MPhil
 - Award the MPhil, subject to minor corrections where these can be completed by the supervisor
 - No award
- 5.5 For MPhil submissions, the examiners may recommend one of the following options:
- Award the MPhil
 - Award the MPhil, subject to minor corrections where these can be completed by the supervisor
 - No award

6. Before the thesis has been submitted for examination - candidate has not completed the minimum period of registration

- 6.1 If the candidate had not completed the minimum period of registration at the time of death it is highly unlikely that sufficient work could have been completed at a high enough level to justify the award of a doctoral degree; however, there may be sufficient work to consider the award of an MPhil, or other suitable exit award, depending on the degree for which the student is registered.
- 6.2 The supervisor should collate the material produced by the candidate, which demonstrates their performance at a standard equivalent to the requirements of the degree for which they were registered. This would normally include thesis chapters, progress reports, conference papers, work prepared for publications and publications. The supervisor's statement should explain the nature of the submission, outlining where the material produced by the candidate fits into the planned programme of work and why the award of the degree should be recommended. As part of the collation, the supervisor may need to provide some linking statements to explain how the material fits together. Any such links should be clearly indicated as being the work of the supervisor and not the candidate.
- 6.3 The collated material and supporting statement should initially be considered by an independent subject expert, nominated by the Head of Department, whose role will be to determine whether the submission should be sent to examiners for formal consideration.
- 6.4 If the decision is to proceed to examination, internal and external examiners will be appointed. The examiners will be made aware of the circumstances surrounding the

submission. The examiners will consider the portfolio of work submitted, along with the supervisor's supporting statement. The examiners can make one of the following recommendations:

- Award the MPhil
- Award the MPhil, subject to minor corrections where these can be completed by the supervisor
- No award

7. Additional information

- 7.1 Examiners' report forms and recommendations will be subject to Faculty approval, as standard. A Special Regulation is not necessary.
- 7.2 Where a posthumous award has been made, the thesis should normally contain an explanatory note stating that the award was made posthumously and therefore some errors might exist in the thesis.
- 7.3 An electronic copy of the final thesis should be submitted to the White Rose Etheses Online server.
- 7.4 If the award is made on the above basis, all documentation (award letter and degree certificate) will specify that the degree was awarded posthumously. If the student had completed academically, but not yet been awarded their degree (e.g. due to outstanding debt, etc.), the degree certificate and award letter will not state that the degree was awarded posthumously.

8. Aegrotat awards

- 8.1 In very exceptional circumstances, the examiners may recommend the award of an aegrotat degree if a candidate is close to submission and is prevented by terminal illness from making a final submission of their thesis, undertaking the viva, or completing post-viva corrections, including a resubmission.
- 8.2 Some professional doctorates may prohibit the award of an aegrotat degree and where this is the case it should be specified in programme regulations.
- 8.3 Where an aegrotat award is recommended, the University should be satisfied that the candidate's prior performance shows, beyond a reasonable doubt, that the candidate would have successfully completed the degree were it not for their illness. Appropriate medical evidence must be provided to support an aegrotat award.
- 8.4 The candidate must confirm in writing their willingness to accept an Aegrotat award before the examination process begins. An Aegrotat award does not entitle the holder to registration with a professional body, or exemption from the requirements of any professional qualification which might otherwise be associated with the programme of study.

9. Following thesis submission, but no examination (or re-examination) has taken place and the candidate is not capable of attending an oral examination

- 9.1 If the thesis has been submitted but not yet examined (or re-examined), examiners must be nominated and the thesis assessed in the usual way. The examiners will need to be informed of the circumstances.
- 9.2 Examiners' report forms and recommendations will be subject to Faculty approval, as standard. A Special Regulation is not necessary.

10. Before the thesis has been submitted for examination

- 10.1 In order for an aegrotat award to be considered, the candidate must have completed sufficient work of a standard equivalent to the requirements of the degree for which they are registered. The student is responsible for presenting their work for consideration with their supervisor's support.
- 10.2 The collated material and supporting statement should initially be considered by an independent subject expert, nominated by the Head of Department, whose role will be to determine whether the submission should be sent to examiners for formal consideration.
- 10.3 If the decision is to proceed to examination, internal and external examiners will be appointed. The examiners will be made aware of the circumstances surrounding the submission.
- 10.4 Examiners' report forms and recommendations will be subject to Faculty approval, as standard. A Special Regulation is not necessary.

11. Formal approval of the examiners' recommendation

- 11.1 Where the examiners make a recommendation for either an aegrotat or posthumous degree to be awarded this should be forwarded to the PGR Support Team in the first instance, for formal Faculty approval.

Approved May 2020