ACADEMIC REGULATIONS FOR RESEARCH DEGREES

RCSI

UNIVERSITY
OF MEDICINE
AND HEALTH
SCIENCES

INTRODUCTION

1. GENERAL INFORMATION

1.1 Overview of Postgraduate Research Degrees at RCSI.

RCSI offers research degrees at level 9 and level 10 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). The award of MSc and MCh is made at level 9 on the NFQ; this is equivalent to level 7 in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), and is Bologna second cycle compliant. The award of PhD, MD and Professional Doctorate is made at level 10 on the NFQ; this is equivalent to level 8 in the EQF, and is Bologna third cycle compliant[5].

Research degrees are accredited jointly by RCSI and NUI and are awarded without classification.

The document that follows describes regulations for the conduct of research degrees at NFQ level 9 (MSc & MCh) and level 10 (MD, PhD and DProf) at RCSI.

The regulations apply to all research scholars registered at RCSI. These regulations apply whether the scholar is full time or part time and regardless of the regulations of any associated / collaborating institution involved in the project. PhD, MD and DProf. scholars must be examined by thesis and by *viva voce* examination.

Any deviation from these regulations may only be considered in exceptional circumstances and must be agreed in writing by the Head of School of Postgraduate Studies, Dublin. This school is the RCSI facilitator for the examination processes for all research degree programmes.

All scholars, including scholars returning to their programme following a leave of absence or withdrawal, are governed by the Academic Regulations in place in the academic session they (re-)register.

1.2 Definition of Research Degree

A research degree is defined as a higher degree awarded following the completion and successful examination of a thesis that describes a substantial body of original research. The research must make a distinct contribution to the field of study, must be publishable in peer-reviewed journals and must have been conducted according to ethical guidelines. The thesis must be presented to a professional standard and according to published guidelines and must demonstrate the originality of the research, the scholar's knowledge of the field and evidence of critical judgement. PhD, MD and DProf awards also require the successful examination of a scholar in a *viva voce* examination. Level 9 awards may, in certain circumstances, also require a *viva voce* examination.

A successful research award requires scholars to produce a large volume of work and acquire all appropriate skills as defined by the National Framework of Qualifications document. These skills and knowledge must be at the forefront of a field of learning and scholars should be sufficiently competent to provide leadership in their field of learning.

The following are essential elements in the definition of a research degree:

» **Ethical research:** if the thesis includes information relating to humans or animals, including biological samples or data, full Research Ethics Committee approval must have been obtained in order for the work to have been completed. A statement to this effect must be included in the thesis.

» **Originality:** the scholar must have demonstrated an ability to conduct an original research investigation and to test a hypothesis, preferably their own.

» **Knowledge of the field:** the scholar must be able to connect their research hypothesis and theme to wider knowledge of the subject and they must demonstrate their familiarity with relevant published work on the topic.

» **Publication:** the material in the thesis should be suitable for publication in a peer-reviewed, high impact journal relevant to the thesis topic. While it is preferable for the scholar to have published work from the thesis, it is not essential to do this in order to be successful in the examination; however, the work presented must be publishable.

» **Presentation:** the thesis must be written clearly and concisely and must follow standard scientific format. The normal length of an MSc/MCh thesis is 20,000 to 60,000 words excluding tables, figures, appendices and references, and the normal length of a PhD/MD thesis should not exceed 100,000

words excluding tables, figures, appendices and references. DProf theses should normally be 45,000-60,000 words

» **Examination:** for an MSc/MCh award, the scholar must be examined by written thesis examination on the thesis topic and the examination outcome must be successful. For a PhD, MD and DProf award, the scholar must be examined by written thesis and in a *viva voce* examination on the thesis topic (and related subjects) and the examination outcome must be successful. The final award of the degree is dependent on success in the *viva voce* examination and submission of an approved written thesis.

1.3 Governance and Management of Research Degree Programmes leading to Major Awards

The main school responsible for postgraduate research scholars is the School of Postgraduate Studies (SPGS). The SPGS manages the admission, training, mentorship, progress review, and examination of all research postgraduate scholars, including PhD, MD, DProf, MSc (Research) and MCh (Research). Scholars will also be aligned with their host department, institute or school.

All issues associated with the approval of programme-related matters are first brought to the SPGS Committee. The SPGS Committee decides on all matters relating to scholar registration, the annual review process, scholar performance and progression, approval of nominated reviewers and examiners, and facilitates the development of new educational modules/workshops for postgraduate scholars.

There are two Committees that report to the SPGS Committee:
1. Academic Review Committee (ARC). The ARC approves new scholars, nominated supervisors and annual reviewers.
2. Postgraduate Programmes Management Committee (PPMC). The PPMC is responsible for ensuring the effective day-to-day governance and consistency of quality of taught postgraduate programmes and awards aligned to the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) under the direction of the Faculty of Medicine & Health Sciences (FHMS).

The SPGS Committee reports to the RCSI Academic Council

» Academic Council (AC). The Academic Council is responsible for the implementation of policy which is determined by the Medicine and Health Sciences Board (MHSB). It addresses all matters concerning the administration of RCSI's Irish and International Schools. This includes student admissions, assessment, progression and welfare in all degree level programmes; curricula and learning technology; research activities; and academic staff appointments and promotions. The Academic Council meets monthly throughout the academic year and reports to the MHSB.

» Medicine and Health Sciences Board (MHSB). The MHSB is the authority on degree-awarding activities within RCSI– University of Medicine and Health Sciences. Its principal members are the President and Vice President of RCSI, Vice Chancellor and the Deputy Vice Chancellor; representatives of staff; students; health service & educational partners and of the public interest.

ENTRY

2. APPLICATION PROCEDURE

2.1 General overview

The recruitment/registration process for prospective scholars has three phases. Initially, the scholar finds a project of interest using the RCSI website, and submits an expression of interest by emailing the supervisor directly (Phase 1). Next, the supervisor interviews the scholar and if the supervisor agrees to undertake supervision of the scholar, at least one co-supervisor is appointed (Phase 2). The supervisor and co-supervisor will then assist the scholar to complete a project proposal (the forms can be found under the 'register' tab online). Where relevant, they must also nominate annual reviewers. They must also nominate annual reviewers. The scholar submits the project proposal as part of the application procedure. This is reviewed by the Academic Review Committee (ARC) which looks at the planned depth of engagement with the research topic, the feasibility of the work, and the available resources to complete the work.

To ensure the highest standards are set with all postgraduate research projects at RSCI, ARC may seek additional clarification or request that additional work packages are modified. Finally, the scholar uses the Apply Online portal to submit their project proposal plan and the programme application forms (Phase 3). After confirming that all required documentation has been received, and that the supervisor has agreed to supervise the scholar, this information is then reviewed by the ARC committee who approve the scholar's registration. Finally, the scholar is able to 'accept offer' online using the student record information online system (Quercus).

To apply for a place on any research programme, the scholar must have first secured both a primary supervisor and a co-supervisor and agreed a topic for their thesis. Only then can the scholar submit an online application via Quercus (apply online). For scholars applying to a programme (e.g. SPHeRE, DProf.), they need to go through the specific programme selection procedure and receive an official letter-of-offer before initiating registration through the Apply Online system.

2.2 Finding a project (Phase 1)

Postgraduate Research (PGR) scholars are expected to find suitable supervisors from the information available on the RCSI website, and should not contact the SPGS office directly. Only Scholars seeking to apply for the SPHeRE, DProf. or StAR programmes should contact the SPGS office.

Available sources of information include:
» RCSI website projects page (current projects).
» RCSI website researcher list online.

2.3 Expressing interest in a project (Phase 1)

PGR scholars must apply to the supervisors directly, unless specifically advised otherwise (e.g. SPHeRE).

2.4 Scholar selection by the supervisor (Phase 2)

Most PGR scholars will be selected by their potential supervisor, after an interview process. The exception is programme-funded PhDs/MDs where a selection panel shortlists and interviews the scholars.

2.5 Application using Apply Online (Phase 3)

To register as a scholar at RCSI, the scholar needs to register for a specific programme using Quercus' 'Apply Online' System. Only PGR scholars who have already been selected by an RCSI supervisor (or admitted onto a specific PhD Programme) should use this system.

The application must include the details of the proposed research project. Applicants must complete a Research Project Proposal and upload it to their online application. Before accessing the Online Application system it is important that the scholar read the Privacy Statement and Terms of Use.

Once submitted, the Application is checked to ensure that all required documentation has been received. The Supervisor is contacted by the SPGS office to confirm that they have agreed to supervise the scholar. The scholar's application then goes to the Academic Review Committee for approval. Once approved, the scholar is informed by email that they have been accepted onto their programme and that they must then register online.

» Documents needed are published on the relevant webpage.

NOTE: please save all documents as PDF and upload PDF only (except portrait picture).

NOTE: all non-EU scholars will need a valid study visa before arriving in Ireland. It is the scholar's responsibility to organise their own visa from the Irish Immigration website .

» The RCSI Quercus online application process uses dedicated URLs to direct scholars to the specific section they need. The scholar will need to choose between the April or October cohorts, based on the month in which they wish to commence the programme.

April cohort	November to April
October cohort	May to October

2.6 Fees

Scholar fees policies are directed by the Fees Office, and thus supersede any fees policies described here.

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3. ENTRY REQUIREMENTS FOR SCHOLARS

3.1 Academic requirements

» **PhD.** In order to apply to register for a PhD at RCSI, scholars must have obtained at least an upper second class (2.1) honours degree (NFQ level 8) in a relevant subject.

» **MD/MCh.** In order to apply to register for an MD at RCSI, scholars must have obtained the degrees of MB BCh BAO and must be eligible for full registration as a medical doctor with the Irish Medical Council. For award of the degree, a period of at least three years must have elapsed from the time the scholar obtained the above degrees. Scholars must also have completed their internship

» **DProf.** In order to apply to register for a DProf at RCSI, scholars should have a minimum of five years experience at a senior level in a health profession and be registered with a professional body (where relevant). Applicants must also have an upper second class (2.1) Honours degree (or equivalent) or an MSc degree..

» **MSc.** In order to apply to register for an MSc at RCSI, scholars must have obtained at least a lower second class (2.2) honours degree in a relevant subject.

» **All PGR Courses (except Prior Publication programmes):** All Scholars must also have an RCSI supervisor(s) with whom they have agreed the topic for their thesis and the logistical details for their project, for example start date, location for initial research training, funding, and the remit of each supervisor. See Section 9 for PhD supervisor eligibility criteria. A co-supervisor or workplace advisor (who may be outside RCSI) must be on the supervisory team.

3.2 English Language Requirements for all Research Degrees

» **English language competency.** There are English language requirements for international scholars who do not have English as their first language. All PGR scholars at RCSI are expected to be able to write, speak and understand academic English. IELTS (Academic) or equivalent English language test scores, for both written and spoken English, are accepted (e.g. TOEFL, Cambridge, etc). An IELTS score of 7.0 is desirable, but scores > 6.5 are

acceptable. The test must be aimed at academic professionals (e.g. IELTS (Academic) or English Test for Academic and Professional Purposes (ETAPP)). We do not accept tests that ONLY examine interactive English.
For more details please go to the **RCSI website**

3.3 Recognition of prior learning

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is defined as the process by which prior learning is given a value. It is a means by which prior learning is formally identified, assessed and acknowledged (see QQI here).

RPL involves the assessment of knowledge, skills and competence previously acquired. Learning occurs in many contexts which include work, involvement in social and community activities, or learning through life experience generally. RPL does not give credit for experience as such; rather it considers the learning that was acquired as a result of the experience.

In RCSI, and in accordance with NUI guidance, RPL may be used to gain:

» Admission to courses/programmes where a person may not have obtained the standard entry requirements.

» Exemptions from course modules which duplicate the learning outcomes an individual has already demonstrably acquired through prior learning.

» Advanced entry into a programme of study (i.e. into Year 2 or Year 3)/transfer between programmes where normal entry would duplicate the learning outcomes an individual has already demonstrably acquired through prior learning.

» If you believe that you qualify for RPL, you must first contact the programme director or Head of School to discuss why you believe you qualify. If the programme director or Head of School agrees, you will need to submit an online application for your chosen programme.

» Once you have applied, you will need to complete an RPL supplemental application form, details on this form will be sent to you after you submit an online application for your chosen programme. Additional RPL policies are available online.

3.4 Transferring from another Third Level Institute

Occasionally scholars transfer into RCSI from other

institutions. This could occur when a supervisor/principal investigator (PI) becomes employed by RCSI and transfers their research grant and scholars; or the scholar themselves may request a transfer.

» In the case of PI employment and transfer of scholars into RCSI the scholar must:

a. Provide an Academic Transcript from the originating institute that includes details about the modules/programmes the scholar completed, and the respective grades. It should also include the start and end dates of the scholar's registration, and thus the number of years the scholar was on the register.

b. Follow the standard 'Apply Online' application process which captures all their details.

» In the case of a scholar spontaneously deciding to move their PhD to RCSI from another Higher Education Institute (HEI), the process is:

a. The scholar finds a supervisor from the researcher list available on the RCSI website. The scholar and supervisor decide on a project together; the scholar then writes a project plan. For recognition of time spent on the project in the previous university, the project must be a continuation of the initial thesis work. The previous institution's supervisors must be in agreement that the project can move to RCSI, else a new project must be initiated with no compensation for previous registration time, in which case the scholar will register for year 1 of their programme.

b. The scholar uses the Apply Online system to register their details, which includes uploading their CV, a project plan, and certified proof of English competency (where necessary). In addition the scholar should also upload PDF copies of a letter from their new supervisor stating their willingness to supervise the scholar, two references, a transcript from the originating HEI showing registration start and end dates, and a letter confirming the funding that they are receiving.

c. The prospective scholar should also separately notify the School of Postgraduate Studies by email to postgraduateschool@rcsi.com of their intention to transfer. The SPGS then organises a

review panel which will comprise 2 independent RCSI researchers within the broad research area and a senior member of the SPGS. The panel will convene a meeting with the scholar to review their eligibility for the programme. Their recommendations will be submitted to the Academic Review Committee.

d. ARC will then review the application and all supporting documentation. They can decide to approve the application, ask for additional documentation, or reject the application.

3.5 Registration to multiple awards concurrently

» RCSI does not allow scholars to register for more than one major award simultaneously.

» In some cases the research degree may include a taught component as part of the main award which may result in a final certificate/diploma being awarded in conjunction with the full Level 9/10 degree.
However this is only valid if:

a. the certificate/diploma does not add an excessive workload for the scholar (i.e. < 30 ECTS credits over the duration of the Level 9/10 degree), or

b. the taught components are relevant to their current research work (i.e. capacity building to enable completion of the thesis work).

3.6 Retrospective registration

» RCSI does not allow retrospective registration for any postgraduate research degrees.

3.7 Continued registration

» All PGR scholars should successfully complete the Annual Progress Review (see section 8) for admission into the next years register.

» Consecutive registration is compulsory. Each year scholars must register online for the following year.

» Scholars who are asked to repeat the review in 6 months time will be rolled to the next years' register, with fees charged accordingly.

» Scholars who do not pass the repeat annual review will have to exit their programme but may be offered the opportunity to submit their research for an alternative award.

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3. ENTRY REQUIREMENTS FOR SCHOLARS (cont.)

» Scholars who do not have the support of their supervisors after the annual review process is complete, will be asked to either (i) find a new supervisor within RCSI who is willing to take over supervision, or (ii) write up for an exit award (where possible) over the next year (provided the laboratory and supervisory support is in place), or (iii) asked to leave RCSI. Scholars may appeal this decision using the standard appeals process as directed by the Student, Academic & Regulatory Affairs (SARA), policy and forms in Moodle.

4. REGISTRATION PROCEDURES

4.1 PhD

» Scholars must register online each year using the 'Confirm Place' function in Quercus, and pay fees each year until they submit their thesis

» Full-time PhD scholars are allowed a minimum of three years and a maximum of six years from initial registration to complete their award. Part-time scholars are allowed a minimum of five years and a maximum of eight years from initial registration to complete their award. Scholars who exceed the maximum registration period must contact the SPGS to discuss their options.

» All full-time scholars must submit annual written reports and present their work in an oral presentation and interview (mini-viva). Part-time scholars submit and present their work on a biennial basis (every two years). Progress is reviewed by reviewers independent of the project who decide on the continued registration of each scholar. Scholars can only progress in their PhD after a satisfactory progress assessment. For full-time scholars this will be at the end of the probationary first year. For part-time scholars the first two years are probationary.

4.2 MD

» Scholars must register online each year using the 'Confirm Place' function in Quercus, and pay fees each year until they submit their thesis

» Full-time MD scholars attend and carry out research under appropriate RCSI supervision for a minimum of two years full-time and a maximum of four years from initial registration. Part-time scholars are allowed a minimum of four years and a maximum of eight years from initial registration to complete their degree. Scholars who exceed the maximum registration period must contact the SPGS to discuss their options.

» All full-time scholars submit annual written reports and present their work in an oral presentation and interview (mini-viva). Part-time scholars submit and present their work on a biennial basis. Progress is reviewed by two reviewers independent of the project who decide whether the scholar can progress to the next year of their studies. Scholars can only progress in their MD after a satisfactory progress assessment at the end of the probationary first year. For part time

scholars the first two years are probationary.

» As well as annual reviews, scholars on the MD programme are expected to complete an early stage and a late stage review. These reviews take the form of a group presentation to an invited panel.

4.3 MSc (Research) and MCh (Research)

» Scholars must register online and pay fees each year until they submit their thesis.

» Full-time MSc/MCh scholars attend and carry out research under appropriate RCSI supervision for a minimum of one year and a maximum of two years from initial registration. Part-time scholars are allowed a minimum of two years and a maximum of four years from initial registration to complete their award. Scholars who exceed the maximum registration period must contact the SPGS to discuss their options.

4.4 Transferring between Research Degrees

Applications to transfer between research degrees can only be submitted after a scholar has been fully registered on their original programme for a minimum of one year. Scholars can only transfer once a year when they are due to register (either October or April).

» Scholars wishing to transfer from a level 9 to a level 10 degree must first meet the minimum entry requirements for the level 10 programme. For instance, a research MSc scholar with a 2.2 undergraduate degree will need to complete their MSc before they can apply for a PhD, as the minimum requirement for entry into the PhD programme is a 2.1 degree or a completed MSc degree (or equivalent).

» Provided they meet the minimum entry requirements, scholars must then complete a Transfer Request Form.

» Further details of the process for transfers are contained in the Transfer Policy, available on Moodle.

» Scholars are advised that they will be liable for any differences in fees between the programmes, backdated for the years that they claim towards their final degree (i.e. if an MD scholar who completes 2 years on the MD programme wishes to

transfer into the 3rd year on the PhD programme, they will be liable for the difference in fees for the PhD programme for the first 2 years). PhD fees are not refunded if a scholar transfers to an MD, MSc or MCh. MD fees are not refunded if the scholar transfers to an MSc or MCh.

4.5 Leave of Absence

» All Research scholars are expected to maintain continuous registration for the duration of their studies. However, RCSI recognizes that unforeseen circumstances can arise which affect a scholar's ability to complete their studies. In line with the University Leave of Absence policy, scholars may request a formal Leave of Absence.

» For Research scholars a formal Leave of Absence can only be granted where there are specific documented circumstances and will only be granted up to the end of the current academic year. A Leave of Absence means that scholars can return to their studies.

» Fees will not be charged for the months that the scholar is absent, if that Leave of Absence has been approved by the SPGS committee. Failure to seek and gain approval from the SPGS committee will result in fees being charged as per stated registration time.

4.6 Withdrawal

» If a scholar wishes to withdraw permanently from the programme, they should complete a Withdrawal from Studies form. (Forms are available on Moodle).

4.7 Final thesis submission

» At the end of the thesis examination process, and/or *viva voce* examination, a specific deadline for the return of the final corrected thesis will be set. This is usually 4 weeks for minor corrections, or 6 months for major corrections.

» Failure to meet this deadline may result in an additional administrative fee (€500), and potentially registration into the following year with additional fees invoiced accordingly.

» Scholars must submit both a hard-bound and PDF version of their thesis, with the latter uploaded to the RCSI institutional repository.

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5. CORE MODULES

All PhD, intercalated MSc and MDs carrying out their research in Bahrain, must complete 4 core modules during their programme. MD, MSc/MCh scholars must complete Postgraduate Essentials and Ethics. Professional Doctorate scholars should refer to section 24 for details of their programme specific modules. All PGR scholars must complete the RCSI institutional Academic Integrity module. These modules are designed to help scholars acquire the necessary skills to allow them to successfully complete their research projects.

They are:
» Postgraduate Essentials (PC01)
» Critical Analysis, Writing & Communication Skills (PC03)
» Biostatistics for Research Postgraduates (PC02)
» Research Ethics and Integrity (PC04)

Successful completion of the modules is contingent upon fulfilling all attendance and assessment requirements for each module.

Core Modules per Course

	PC01 PG Ess	PC02 Biostats	PC03 Writing	PC04 Ethics
PhD	*	*	*	*
MD	*			*
MSc	*			*
MCh	*			*
iMSc	*	*	*	*

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6. ALLOCATED RESEARCH TIME

It is imperative that sufficient dedicated research time is allocated to the scholar to complete their research in a timely manner. This involves reduced workload (e.g. demonstrating), and a limit being set on non-thesis related clinical work.

6.1 Programme Duration (years)

Programme	FT Min	FT Max	PT Min	PT Max
PhD	3 (or 4)	6	5	8
PhD Prior	1	2	n/a	n/a
MD	2	4	4	8
MD Prior	1	2	n/a	n/a
DProf.	3	6	n/a	n/a
MSc	1	2	2	4
MCh	1	2	2	4

» Additional employment should not disrupt the scholars' ability to perform their research.

6.2 Annual Leave

» As a general rule, research scholars should be allowed 25 days of annual leave. Most scholars are 'employed' on state funded scholarships, and thus have an obligation to commit to their research. Annual leave needs to be negotiated directly with the supervisor(s).
» Exceptions include contractual agreements between scholars and the hospital/institute that employs them. Those contractual agreements supercede these guidelines.

7. GOOD RESEARCH PRACTICE

RCSI aspires to the highest standard of research and does its utmost to foster a dynamic, ethical and healthy research environment. In turn, RCSI demands equally high standards of conduct from its scholars.
The Irish quality assurance body, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) have issued a framework document, **Ireland's Framework of Good Practice for Research Degree Programmes** that sets out the key criteria for quality assurance in postgraduate research degrees. While we have developed the **RCSI Statement on Research Integrity**

7. 1. RCSI Statement on Research Integrity

The Statement can be found on the SPGS Moodle page and the university website and scholars should familiarise themselves with it. Areas outlined in the Statement include:

» Research Ethics
» Research Methods and Records
» Authorship and Publications
» Research standards
» Conflict of Interest
» Peer Review

7.2 Research Misconduct

Procedures are in place to deal with allegations of research misconduct should they transpire.

» Research misconduct involves the intent of a researcher to deceive others; including the fabrication of research, illegal use of another researcher's data, and plagiarism of written work.
Plagiarism is taken VERY seriously in RCSI and the university has produced a policy on Academic Integrity which is available on the university **website**. Scholars should also familiarize themselves with the contents of this policy.
» All postgraduate research scholars are expected to attend the core module on Research Ethics within their first year of study at RCSI.

7.3 Acknowledge RCSI in Publications

All registered research scholars in RCSI must acknowledge RCSI in any publications arising from their research.
The words "Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland" must always be listed in the address and in the contact details of research publications.

8. ANNUAL REVIEW PROCESS

8.1 Purpose

The purpose of the Annual Progress Review is to acknowledge good progress made by a scholar, identify any supports needed to ensure on-time completion of the project and provide evidence that a scholar is making adequate advancement in their research project, so that their inclusion on the higher degree by research register can be continued. In their report, scholars are expected to document:

» The background to their project
» The aims and objectives of their project
» The work completed since the last Progress Review/the start of the project (as appropriate)
» Key developments and highlights to date
» Any changes to the direction of the project
» Training and development undertaken
» Training and development needed
» Planned work for the next year
» A timeline for completion of the project
» Impact of their research (publications, conference presentations etc.)

The report will also include a section for the scholar's primary supervisor to complete which will ask the supervisor to comment on the postgraduate scholar's account of their progress, to rate the scholar's progress, and to comment on whether the scholar should continue on the higher degree register.

8.2 Annual Review Process

The process takes the form of a written report (template is available on Moodle) and a mini-*viva voce* that mirrors level 10 NFQ *viva voce* examinations. Scholars upload their report (one single PDF file with the scholar's full name as the filename) using the Moodle-based annual review process. Scholars convene the progress review meeting with their reviewers (using the Moodle-based annual review process) and reviewers submit their written reports. The mini *viva* may be conducted via an online platform. Any expenses incurred in inviting external reviewers must be paid by the supervisor.

» When a scholar is recruited to an MD/PhD programme, Supervisors nominate two appropriate reviewers (one of these reviewers could potentially become the internal examiner for the thesis).

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8. ANNUAL REVIEW PROCESS (cont.).

» The criteria for the appointment of reviewers are: Normally, at least one reviewer must be RCSI academic staff (can include honorary). While both reviewers can be from RCSI, a second reviewer may be selected from another university depending on the collaborative nature of the project and/or expertise required to review progress (Please note that while RCSI staff who are annual reviewers can be appointed internal examiners for the project, annual reviewers cannot be appointed as external examiners.)

- Reviewers must hold a qualification to at least the level of the award the scholar is completing (or equivalent).
- Reviewers must be independent of the scholar's project.
- Reviewers must be sufficiently knowledgeable of the field, but independent of the supervisors.

After reading the Annual Progress report, the reviewers meet the scholar to conduct a mini-*viva voce*.

» Format of the mini-*viva voce*:

- The scholar presents a brief PowerPoint presentation summary of their work (10 minutes max).
- This is followed by questions from the review panel on various aspects of their project, including progress made to date and future plans for the project.
- The reviewers each complete a brief online report on the result of the mini-*viva*, using the Moodle-based Annual Progress Review platform.
- Scholars and supervisors can read the reviewers' report after the submissions have been approved by SPGS.

8.3 Deadlines

Deadlines for the annual review process are set to take account of registration requirements for the next Academic Year and are thus divided by the April or October registration cohorts. All timelines are found on Moodle.

8.4 Review outcomes

Reviewers are asked to rate the scholar's progress since their last progress review, or if this is their first progress review, since they began their research project. The options are:

- Excellent
- Satisfactory
- Needs improvement
- Concerns raised*

*If "Concerns raised" is selected, the reviewers must state what steps the scholar should now take to ensure satisfactory progress is made before their next review which will be scheduled for six months' time.

Reviewers are also asked to come to a unanimous decision regarding whether the scholar should continue on the higher degree register. If the recommendation is that the scholar should not continue on the register, the scholar will have a repeat review in six months' time. If at this repeat review, the reviewers and the primary supervisor's report agree that the scholar should not continue on the higher degree register, the scholar will be discontinued. In certain circumstances, where a scholar has sufficient data collected, scholars may be given the option to exit their level 10 NFQ programme and write up a thesis for a level 9 award.

The scholar can appeal the decision to discontinue them via the formal RCSI Student Appeals Process (details available on Moodle).

9. SUPERVISOR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

9.1 Supervisor eligibility criteria

The Irish quality assurance body QQI have issued a guideline document that sets out the key criteria for quality assurance in postgraduate research degrees. This states that scholars should be supervised by a researcher/s, qualified at least at the level of the award, with demonstrated ability to make original contributions to the relevant field.

SPGS have thus been charged with implementing the national guidelines for quality assurance in postgraduate research education at RCSI, which includes the approval of PGR supervisors. Therefore the supervisory team must:

» Hold a postgraduate research degree of the same or higher qualification than the one the scholar is studying for; or an appropriate professional qualification.

» Hold an academic position within RCSI for at least the duration of the scholar's programme. This can be at an honorary or associate professor level when the SPGS Committee has approved such an appointment.

» Exceptions are made for postdoctoral researchers whose contracts may be shorter than the duration of the scholar's programme.

» Be able to demonstrate a record of research excellence and achievement and have recently published in their field of expertise as a senior author i.e. be first or last author within the last 5 years. Exceptions can be made where a technique/technology used in one field will be used in a different field.

» Have secured sufficient financial resources to cover the consumables cost of the project. This is not relevant for projects in which the consumables cost is negligible, or covered by 3rd parties (e.g. host institution or hospital).

» Have supervised at least one PGR scholar to successful completion as co-supervisor. Previous successful supervision is critical for new primary supervisors. Successful MSc supervision is included in the accessible PGR programmes for primary PhD supervisors.

» Have completed their PGR degree at least 12 months prior to the scholar's first registration (exceptions can be made for those completing/who have completed the RCSI MD/PhD Prior Publication Programmes).

9.2 SPGS authority regarding supervisor eligibility

» The SPGS committee may consider special cases from time to time on a case-by-case basis.

9.3 Quality supervision

Supervisors must ensure that they have read and signed the RCSI Supervisor Charter that sets out the key roles and responsibilities of supervisors at RCSI.

» Researchers who have not had experience supervising level 10 Doctoral scholars must attend supervisor training.

» Where a new supervisor unknown to the SPGS in the capacity of supervision of a higher degree by research scholar is proposed, SPGS may request their CV or further details of their suitability to research supervision. The SPGS reviews requests to update supervision and may suggest alternative supervision arrangements.

» All supervisors are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the Supervisor resources section of the SPGS Moodle page available on Moodle. This contains important information about how PGR programmes are managed at RCSI, internal deadlines, and useful links to further information and resources.

» To ensure quality supervision for all our PGR scholars, supervisors should not supervise more than 6 PGR scholars (FTE) simultaneously.

» When the SPGS is informed that issues have arisen in the relationship between a supervisor and a scholar, both parties will be directed to the Creating a Positive Research Environment policy (available on Moodle).

9.4 Continuity of supervision

There are many reasons why the supervision of a scholar for a higher degree by research may change. These may relate to a supervisor moving to another institution in Ireland or abroad; a supervisor retiring before a thesis is completed; a supervisor changing their research focus to another area; the research project developing in an unforeseen direction necessitating the inclusion of additional expertise in the supervision team; the death of a supervisor; a supervisor becoming incapacitated through ill health and so on.

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9. SUPERVISOR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES (cont.).

» In the event that a change of supervision becomes necessary, the supervisory team should engage with the SPGS to ensure a smooth transition to a new arrangement in a manner which minimises potential distress to the scholar.

» The postgraduate scholar should be included in the discussions as early as is practicable and every effort must be made to ensure that the new arrangement is satisfactory to all involved.

» Where a supervisor retires or resigns from the staff of RCSI, or for any other reason is unable to continue to supervise the research, temporarily or permanently, the SPGS shall make appropriate arrangements for the supervision of the scholar, including where required, the appointment of a new supervisor. Where a Principal Supervisor or co-supervisor is absent (e.g. on sabbatical or maternity leave) for part of the duration of the scholar's research, it will be the responsibility of the supervisory team to ensure a smooth and timely transition where a change of supervisor takes place. Changes in supervisory arrangements must be made on the basis of agreement between the supervisors, the scholar, the proposed supervisor and the Head of the SPGS or nominee.

9.5 Primary supervisor's specific responsibilities

In addition to the in-depth research supervision role, the primary supervisor is responsible for ensuring that certain administrative tasks are completed during the scholar's time on the register. These tasks include, but are not limited to, the following:

» Ensuring that scholars meet their deadlines.

» Submitting nominations of appropriate reviewers for progress reviews of the scholar, having first ascertained that the proposed reviewers agreed to act in this capacity in the allotted time.

» Submitting the nominations of appropriate thesis examiners (usually one RCSI examiner and one external examiner) for the scholar, having first ascertained that the proposed examiners meet the criteria and have agreed to act in this capacity within the allotted time frame.

» Mentoring, supporting and advising the scholar in the production of a written thesis.

» Signing the relevant examination entry form indicating that the scholar's thesis can be submitted for examination by the examiners approved to do so.

9.6 Collective responsibilities of the supervisory team

» To advise the scholar on the selection of the research topic and the nature and quality of the programme of research to be undertaken.

» To ensure that the scholar acquires training in the methodology of research and in the skills necessary for sustained, independent effort, by advising on their training needs and giving permission to register for structured training where appropriate.

» To implement RCSI's codes of practice for the conduct of research and employment of the working policies of the ethics committee.

» To provide protected time for completion of research study-related activities, with at least 80% full time equivalent time made available.

» To provide contact and guidance through regular and systematic meetings; to request regular written submissions as appropriate and to provide constructive evaluation and criticism in reasonable time.

» To ensure that the scholar is made aware of any shortfalls of progress or standards relative to the standard expected and, where necessary, to advise on withdrawal from the programme.

» To complete an annual progress report with the scholar. Supervisors must nominate reviewers using the Moodle based annual review process.

» To appoint suitable internal and external examiners in a timely manner, at least 6 months before the expected thesis submission date. To advise on the methodology and form of presentation of the thesis and to approve the thesis before submission by signing the Thesis Approval Form. This ensures that a thesis cannot be submitted without the explicit approval of the supervisor.

» To acknowledge a scholar's contribution in any presentation, publication or meeting which involves the scholar's research work.

9.7 Supervisor responsibilities regarding examinations

To ensure smooth organisation of the examination process, supervisors should:

» Nominate examiners at least 6 months before the scholar is due to submit their thesis. This is to ensure sufficient time for recommendation for approval by the SPGS Committee to Academic Council (AC) and thereafter to Medicine and Health Sciences Board (MHSB). When this process is completed, appointment of external examiners is made by the National University of Ireland (NUI). Please note that MHSB does not meet between May and September each year.

» Nominate for appointment as examiners only persons who are likely to examine within a reasonable time-frame. The judgment of the supervisor in this regard is very important, as taking an excessive period of time to conclude the examination process is unfair to the scholar.

» Obtain the prior agreement of the recommended examiners that they are prepared to act in their respective capacities within an agreed timeframe.

» Ensure that the SPGS is informed of any change in address or circumstance of either examiner.

» Inform the SPGS if the external examiner needs to sign relevant confidentiality or non-disclosure agreements where this is essential to the protection of intellectual property rights contained in the thesis.

» Ensure, as far as possible, that scholars are not unduly delayed in the submission of their theses and be aware of any fees implications for scholars who are delayed in submitting their thesis.

» Ensure that the thesis meets standard scientific format and is of the required quality.

» Ensure that the thesis is written according to SPGS regulation guidelines and conforms to ethical standards and good research practice.

» Not recommend for appointment as external examiner a person who has acted in this capacity within the same research group in RCSI within the preceding three calendar years. This is to avoid a situation where familiarity could, or could be perceived, to prejudice objective judgement. Exceptional circumstances that may justify re-appointment of the same person as external examiner within this timeframe must be clearly outlined to the Head of SPGS.

» Not contact either examiner about the thesis examination once their appointments have been approved.

» Ensure that all necessary approval(s) from Research Ethics Committee(s) and animal licensing are clearly described in the thesis.

» Ensure that the scholar includes in their Thesis Acknowledgement Section the source of funding for their research and refer scholars to any specific acknowledgement required by the funding agency.

» Ensure that any IP/patent/commercialisation potential in the thesis is protected by informing the SPGS in advance of submission.

» If not present at the *viva voce* examination (where applicable), be available to address any questions that may arise before, during or after the *viva voce* examination.

» If present at the *viva voce* examination (where applicable), take notes as required to assist with corrections later and provide clarification if required by the examiners. Supervisors must remain silent throughout the *viva voce* examination unless specifically requested to respond to a question by the examiners.

» Liaise with the internal examiner, if required, in seeking clarification of any required corrections after the *viva voce*/thesis examination.

» Assist the scholar in completing any required corrections after the *viva voce*/thesis examination.

» Confirm in writing to the SPGS that the scholar has implemented any corrections required by the examiners.

» Co-sign, with the scholar, the Copyright and Thesis Distribution Request form to indicate approval of any embargo on the final, approved hard-bound and PDF versions of the thesis.

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10. THESIS SUBMISSION

All research scholars must submit a written thesis for examination. The traditional format for the thesis is the 'Classical' (monograph) format except for scholars wishing to be examined for a PhD/MD by Publication or an MD/PhD by Prior Publication. These theses will take the format of a 'Thesis-by-Publication' (see details in Section 20 and Section 21 below).

After the scholar has completed their thesis, and checked the text through TurnItIn, they must email a PDF copy of their thesis, the TurnItIn report and the appropriate examination entry form to postgraduateschool@rcsi.ie. They may also be asked to submit two soft-bound physical copies of the thesis to the SPGS. A scholar must be at a fully registered status in Quercus when the thesis is submitted. The SPGS, having checked that registration requirements have been met, necessary core modules have been completed, fees have been paid in full and examiners have been approved, sends one copy of the thesis to each examiner outlining the process for the examination. The examiners are allowed up to four weeks for an MSc/MCh or up to eight weeks for PhD/MD to DProf. in which to examine the thesis and submit independent reports on the Thesis Report form. PhD/MD to PhD/MD/DProf. examiners must submit their reports on the Thesis Report form seven days before the *viva voce* exam. If either examiner requests a physical copy of the thesis in order to examine it, they may request it through the SPGS. Examiners may print a copy of the thesis and seek reimbursement for any associated costs through the SPGS.

If either examiner requests significant modifications to the thesis, the pending *viva voce* examination may be postponed. The decision to postpone the *viva voce* will be made in consultation with the Head of SPGS, who will liaise with the supervisor. The supervisor in turn will manage the necessary corrections and resubmission of the thesis by the scholar.

On rare occasions a scholar may not be able to meet the thesis submission deadline. If this happens, the scholar will need to contact postgraduateschool@rcsi.ie for advice and further instruction.

10.1 *Viva voce* examination

All level 10 awards (PhD, MD, DProf.) are examined by written thesis and a *viva voce*. On occasion, a scholar completing a level 9 award (MSc, MCh) may be asked to complete a *viva voce* examination, usually at the discretion of the examiners. The persons present at the *viva voce* examination are usually the scholar, at least one external examiner, internal examiner and an independent chair.

The supervisor may attend as an observer but their attendance is at the scholar's discretion. However, if the supervisor does not attend they must be available by phone or in person before, during and immediately after the *viva voce* examination. If the supervisor is present for the *viva voce* examination, they act as an observer only and cannot contribute unless the examiners specifically seek their clarification on a question.

From time to time, the Head of SPGS may wish to appoint an observer. This may include attendance by a completely independent PhD, MD or DProf. supervisor as part of their own training. No more than one such person can attend any particular *viva voce* examination. After the SPGS has sent the copies of the thesis to the examiners, arrangements are made by SPGS for the *viva voce* examination and the SPGS appoints an independent chairperson. The scholar and supervisor must not be involved in the travel arrangements for the External Examiner.

The *viva voce* examination consists of a presentation by the scholar on the project, for example by PowerPoint, of no longer than 20 minutes duration. The presentation is followed by the questioning of the scholar by both examiners, on the content of the presentation, the thesis and related matters. Scholars must take a copy of their thesis into the oral examination and refer to it as appropriate. It is recommended that the *viva voce* examination, including the presentation, should last no longer than three hours. The chair should allow opportunities for breaks as necessary.

RCSI aims to provide as much flexibility as possible for candidates and examination panels in the operation of *viva voce* examinations. There are now three options for the examination:

1. the traditional in-person *viva voce* examination (this must take place in RCSI Dublin, in-person, in a neutral setting and location considered to be appropriate)

2. a virtual setting (normally using MS Teams)

3. a combination of in-person/virtual settings where some members of the panel may be together in-person and others online.

All parties must be in agreement with the proposed format. If the candidate is not supportive of the virtual/blended format then the *viva voce* must be postponed until an in-person examination can be arranged.

On the mutually agreed date of the *viva voce* examination, the examiners and the chair meet before the *viva voce* examination starts. The examiners identify issues to be raised in the *viva voce* examination, agree the broad strategy (e.g. who will ask which questions and in what order) and confer with the chair on points of procedure.

The *viva voce examination* may not proceed without all the examiners being present. In the event of an examiner's or the scholar's unexpected absence, for example due to illness, the examination must be postponed to another date.

When all parties are prepared, the chair invites the scholar into the room and completes the introductions. The chair asks the scholar to commence their presentation. The examiners do not normally ask questions during the presentation, it is after the presentation that the examiners' questions begin. After completion of the questioning, the chair asks the supervisor, if present, to leave the room and gives the scholar an opportunity to mention anything additional in their thesis defence. After this, the chair asks the scholar to leave the room and the examiners deliberate and agree on their recommendation. The chair calls the scholar back into the room and tells them what the examiners recommend. The supervisor may be present for the recommendation, but this is at the discretion of the scholar.

Neither the scholar nor the supervisor may be present for the examiners' meeting prior to the *viva voce* examination, nor after the questioning when examiners are deliberating on the result, nor when the joint examiners report is being written.

On completion of the *viva voce* examination, the examiners complete a Joint Examiners Report form giving their recommendation on the outcome of the examination and their comments on the thesis and the scholar's performance at the *viva voce* examination. Examiners must select one of the categories of award on the form (see details in Section 14: Categories of Decision). The examiners usually write their joint report after the scholar has been advised of the result and before exiting the examination room. If a detailed report is required, this can be submitted (by email) to SPGS after the *viva voce* examination but must be within four working days. The Chair of the *viva voce* also submits a report.

10.1.1 Virtual/hybrid *viva voce* examination

Where a *viva voce* is conducted in a virtual or hybrid format, the following arrangements apply:

» All parties (candidate, external examiner, internal examiner, chair) must confirm that they agree to the *viva voce* examination being conducted remotely using Microsoft (MS) Teams.

» The technology used must support video and audio connections and the parties must confirm that they have relevant equipment and that it is plugged in to maintain battery life for the duration of the examination.

» All parties must have a private location, free of distractions, for the duration of the examination.

» The *viva* must commence using both video and audio, however, video does not need to be maintained by all parties throughout. For example, the chair may not require video throughout and it should be noted that maintaining active video engagement may be difficult if there is also a need to simultaneously consult an online version of the thesis.

» If there is a failure in the connection/technology, attempts should be made to re-connect. In the event of a serious or protracted breakdown in the connection or quality of the connection of more than 20 minutes, the *viva* should be halted. However, if it is clear before these 20 minutes have elapsed that re-connection cannot be made or is unlikely, the *viva* should be halted.

» The decision as to whether to halt a *viva* should be made by the independent chair.

» The candidate cannot use the MS Teams format as grounds for a later appeal.

» Recordings of the examination must not take place by any party. Attempts to present evidence based on

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recordings of the *viva voce* examination will not be permissible in any appeal process.

» If the candidate is located remotely, they can nominate and have a supervisor/observer present with them either for the entire *viva*, or for the communication of the decision. This individual is not allowed to contribute in any way to the *viva*, and must be introduced at the start.

» The *viva* should be scheduled at a time that is reasonable for the time zone in which the candidate is located.

» The independent chair should ensure that all the guidelines for the examination are followed before, during and after the examination.

10.1.1.1 Before the virtual/hybrid *viva voce* examination

» The external and internal examiners' separate pre-*viva* reports **must** have been submitted in advance of the *viva* and shared with the examination panel (external examiner, internal examiner and independent chair).

» The independent chair should have a copy of any presentation that the candidate is expected to make as part of the *viva* in case of technical difficulties. The chair can then display the presentation if necessary during the *viva*.

» The independent chair pack, which includes the independent chair report and the joint examiners report with the preliminary suggested recommendation from each examiner, will be sent via email to the chair in advance of the *viva voce* examination.

10.1.1.2 During the virtual/hybrid *viva voce* examination

» The *viva* will take the format of a standard in-person *viva*.

» If the *viva* has to be halted due to a breakdown in the connection or quality of the connection, the independent chair should consult with the examiners via an alternative method (e.g. telephone). The examiners should decide whether there is a need to reconvene at another date or whether sufficient discussion has taken place, such that further examination would not change the outcome of the examination. In arriving at such a decision, the examiners should take into account the requirements

and outcomes of a doctoral degree and not the extent to which they have covered the contents of the thesis. If it is agreed that the *viva* needs to be re-scheduled this should be at a mutually agreed time for all parties. The independent chair should communicate the outcome of this decision to the candidate as soon as possible.

» A member of the SPGS Operations team will not be in attendance at the *viva* but will be contactable if needed.

10.1.1.3 External and Internal examiner discussion during the virtual/hybrid *viva voce* examination

» In order that the examiners can discuss the candidate's performance, the candidate must leave the MS Teams call and the chair must confirm that this has happened. The candidate should be advised how they will be contacted to invite them back into the meeting and given an approximate time when this will happen.

» The chair must be a part of the post-*viva* discussion to ensure that any decisions are based solely on the candidate's performance and do not reflect issues related to the format of the *viva*.

10.1.1.4 Communication of the decision during the virtual/hybrid *viva voce* examination

» The candidate should be contacted and invited to re-join the meeting. They may be accompanied by a supervisor/observer.

» Candidates should be informed of the outcome of their examination as soon as possible. The possible outcomes and procedures to be followed are the same as for a standard *viva*.

» The communication of outcomes should be sensitive to the fact that the doctoral examination is the most significant culmination of the candidate's work and that the normal support and activities surrounding this examination are likely to be disrupted when the candidate is in a different location to the examiners.

10.2 Submission of final thesis documents

If there are no corrections required to the thesis then the scholar must print 1 hard-bound copy of the final corrected version of the thesis and submit this to the SPGS office within 2 weeks of the examiners' approval of

the final thesis. The PDF version of the final version of the thesis must also be submitted to the library for inclusion in the institutional repository portal within 2 weeks of the examiners' approval of the final thesis.

Where there are minor or major corrections to the thesis required, the examiners will agree on an acceptable deadline for the corrections to be submitted to the SPGS for review by them. It is the scholar's responsibility to ensure that all corrections are completed in this timeframe, and approved by their primary supervisor, before submission to the SPGS office. The scholar must then send the updated thesis to the internal examiner in the case of minor corrections and to the internal and external examiner in the case of major corrections. The SPGS must be cc'd on these emails. Where there are two external examiners for a thesis, and the recommendation of the examination panel is minor corrections, the examiners must agree which examiner will sign off on the corrections.

Once the revised thesis has been approved by the examiners, the scholar will need to print 1 hard-bound copy of the final corrected version of the thesis and submit this to the SPGS office within 2 weeks of the examiners' approval of the final thesis.

The PDF version of the final version of the thesis must also be submitted to the library for inclusion in the institutional repository within 2 weeks of the examiners' approval of the final thesis.

Registration is paused once the scholar submits their soft-bound thesis for examination, so no further fees are incurred by the scholar. However, once the agreed deadline for corrections has been exceeded and/or the scholar fails to submit both the hard-bound and PDF versions of the final thesis to the SPGS office within 2 weeks of the examiners' approval, then an additional administrative fee of €500 may be levied. Scholars are reminded that they cannot graduate unless they are in good standing with the University's fees office.

11. APPOINTMENT OF EXAMINERS

In order to set and maintain the highest standards for our higher degrees it is imperative that suitably qualified external and internal examiners are nominated and appointed. In combination, the internal and external examiners must have sufficient expertise, knowledge and understanding of the relevant fields; this is particularly important where the thesis topic is interdisciplinary. For *viva voce* examinations, the role of the chairperson is to ensure that regulations are followed and that the examination operates smoothly and fairly.

» Each MSc and MCh scholar is examined by written thesis by one external examiner and one internal examiner. If the scholar is a member of RCSI staff, the thesis will be examined by two external examiners. At the discretion of the external examiner, a scholar may be required to attend a *viva voce* examination.

» Each PhD, MD and DProf. scholar is examined by written thesis and *viva voce* examination by one external examiner and one internal examiner, all in the presence of an independent chairperson If the scholar is a member of RCSI staff, or the thesis for examination has been submitted via the prior publication route, the internal examiner must be replaced by a second external examiner. For joint/double/multiple awards, appointment of examiners and mode of examination will be determined within the specific agreement documents with the relevant institutions.

11.1 Conflict of Interest

» Thesis examiners must examine, and be seen to examine, the scholar and the thesis without prejudice or conflict from any direction.

» If a reasonable person not involved in the examination process would consider that the presence of a particular examiner could cause concern regarding bias either to the scholar's advantage or disadvantage, then such an examiner is deemed unsuitable. Supervisors must take all reasonable steps to avoid recommending examiners whose relationship with the supervisor, scholar or RCSI Department, whether personal or professional, could be viewed as preventing an impartial judgement of the thesis and the scholar.

» It is the responsibility of examiners to declare any potential conflict of interest when asked to examine a scholar.

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11. APPOINTMENT OF EXAMINERS (cont.).

» If the SPGS Committee perceives a potential conflict of interest in an examiner nomination the supervisor will seek expert guidance in the selection of an alternative examiner.

11.2 Nomination

» The Primary Supervisor (or nominee) needs to nominate the Examiners at least 6 months prior to the expected thesis completion date, using the online form.

» All research examiners are appointed following:
  - (a) nomination by the supervisor.
  - (b) recommendation by the SPGS Committee.
  - (c) recommendation by Academic Council.
  - (d) approval by RCSI Medicine and Health Sciences Board.
  - (e) approval by the Senate of the National University of Ireland.

» External examiners are subject to approval by the Senate of the National University of Ireland (NUI), which makes the official appointments on behalf of RCSI. In order to allow sufficient time for this process the supervisor must nominate examiners at least six months prior to thesis submission. In the event of the supervisor being unable to recommend a suitable examiner, the SPGS Committee may suggest an appropriate person who fulfils the required criteria.

» Conversely, supervisors must ensure that examiner nominations are not made too far in advance of thesis submission. This is to ensure that examiners approved to examine a thesis and scholar continue to meet the criteria for their appointment at the time of the examination. RCSI approved examiner nominations are valid for 18 months, after which time, alternative examiner nominations will be required.

» The relevant Examiner Nomination form must be used when submitting nominations for review. Supervisors must provide details of the examining experience of proposed examiners. For MCh and MD awards, the combined experience of the examination panel should include, where possible, relevant clinical expertise.

11.3 Criteria for Appointment

The selection of the research examination team reflects on the reputation and credibility of the specific examination; of RCSI's standards in delivering research degrees; and of the reputation more generally of the academic community in delivering and impartially examining these primary research degrees. Thus every appointment must be made to ensure and protect this credibility – potential appointees who might otherwise be very suitable should be considered with the wider reputation of the examination process as the priority.

» Internal Examiners

Internal examiners must:
- Be members of academic staff at RCSI and should normally hold a PhD or MD degree or equivalent. Honorary lecturers or Emeritus professors can act as examiners on condition they have recent (<3 years) relevant publications.
- Hold at least the position of Lecturer or its equivalent.
- Have general expertise of the research area of the thesis.
- Be experienced in research in the general area of the scholar's thesis.
- Be sufficiently independent of the supervisor.
- Be independent of the scholar and the external examiner.
- Be familiar with RCSI higher degree regulations.
- Not be the scholar's thesis supervisor.
- Not have a conflict of interest - this includes but is not restricted to the following:
  (a) Having published with the scholar within the three years preceding the examination.
  (b) Having a personal relationship with the scholar, supervisor or external examiner.
  (c) Having any involvement with the research project.
- Not be registered for a higher degree by research at RCSI or elsewhere.
- Not be a visiting member of staff at RCSI.
- For PhD and MD examinations the internal examiner must not be a junior postdoctoral research fellow.
- Approval will need to be sought and given by the Head of School of Postgraduate Studies before

Internal Examiners are nominated from satellite campuses outside Ireland (e.g. Bahrain).
- The School of Postgraduate Studies Committee has final authority regarding the nomination and appointment of Internal Examiners for recommendation to Academic Council, MHSB and NUI.

» External Examiners

For level 10 awards external examiners are usually appointed from the UK or mainland Europe to examine RCSI PhD and MD theses and scholars. Preference should be given to examiners who are familiar with the general procedure pertaining to this examination in Ireland i.e. required corrections are not provided to the scholar in advance of the *viva voce* examination; a scholar can pass or fail at the *viva voce* examination regardless of the quality of the written thesis. Supervisors considering making a case for the nomination of examiners outside Europe must take account of the financial and logistical challenges that this may present. In circumstances where a supervisor may be required to make a financial contribution to excess costs of the *viva voce* examination, the examiner must not be made aware of this in order to protect the integrity of the examination.

» External Examiners must normally be chosen from outside HEI's in the Republic of Ireland and any associated teaching hospitals. and ideally from the U.K. or Europe:

Only in extremely exceptional circumstances can nominations of Externs be considered from:
- Within the Republic of Ireland. This is normally preserved for research awards where the highly specialised nature of the research indicates that the best European Extern is within RoI.
- Outside of Europe given the financial and logistical implications and challenges.
- Externs must be chosen from outside a university or HEI which collaborates with RCSI.
- In exceptional circumstances an Extern who does not meet the criteria above may be considered for appointment. A detailed rationale and justification must be provided to the School of Postgraduate Studies at postgraduateschool@rcsi.ie for consideration at the SPGS Committee.

- Must be experienced in research in the general area of the scholar's thesis, be specialists in the topics to be examined, and have recent peer-reviewed publications in that area.
- Should hold the position of at least Senior Lecturer at University level and normally hold a PhD or an equivalent higher degree.
- Must hold a current university academic appointment. Honorary lecturers or Emeritus professors can act as examiners on condition they have recent (<3 years) relevant publications at the time of assessment.
- Must normally have previous experience of acting in this capacity for the relevant award.
- Must not have acted as an external examiner in the same research group within the preceding three academic years.

External Examiners must not have a conflict of interest - this includes (but is not restricted to) the following:
- Having published with the scholar or the scholar's supervisor within the three years preceding the examination.
- Holding or having held a grant or financial links/arrangements with the scholar or the scholar's supervisor within the three years preceding the examination.
- Currently serving as a member of staff at RCSI in any capacity, or having been a member of staff at RCSI within the three years preceding the examination.
- Having been a higher degree graduate of RCSI within the three years preceding the examination.
- Being related to the scholar, supervisor or internal examiner.
- Having any involvement with the research project.

» Independent Chair

Where a *viva voce* is required, the Chair is nominated by the SPGS and should:
- Be a member of academic staff at RCSI who hold a higher degree by research. Honorary lecturers or Emeritus professors can act as chairs on condition they have recent (<3 years) relevant publications.

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11. APPOINTMENT OF EXAMINERS (cont.).

- Hold at least the position of Lecturer or its equivalent.
- Be familiar with regulations and procedures governing the *viva voce* examination.
- Not be a supervisor of the scholar.
- Not have a conflict of interest relating to the project, the scholar under examination or either examiner.
- Where possible, the independent chair should be based in an academic department other than that of the scholar and supervisor.
- Where appropriate, due consideration should be given to achieving a gender balance in the panel involved in the *viva voce* examination.

12. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF EXAMINERS

12.1 Internal Examiners

The role of the internal examiner is to examine the thesis in an objective and timely manner; to liaise with the SPGS on points of procedure; and to ensure that consistently high academic standards are maintained. This is particularly important with respect to generic aspects such as quality of the writing and layout of the thesis, as well as the general approach adopted. For MSc and MCh awards the internal examiner should only liaise with the external examiner when completely necessary. When a *viva voce* examination is required, the internal examiner must examine the scholar in a *viva voce* examination and liaise with the external examiner around the marking process.

Once an internal examiner has agreed to act in this capacity, in cooperation with the external examiner where appropriate, they should:

» Acknowledge receipt of the thesis.
» Where a *viva voce* is required, agree on a suitable date for the *viva voce* examination when contacted by the SPGS.
» Direct any questions about the examination process to the SPGS, postgraduateschool@rcsi.ie.
» Read the thesis in its entirety within the required timeframe and assess the work presented in the thesis by the scholar.
» Prepare a written report on the thesis using the appropriate Internal Examiner Report Thesis form and return it to the SPGS within the required timeframe.
» Liaise with the external examiner, only if necessary, when preparing the thesis examination report. If a *viva voce* is required, the internal examiner should only contact the external examiner if necessary, when preparing the *pre-viva voce* examination thesis report. The internal examiner should retain a record of all such interactions with the external examiner.
» Where a *viva voce* is required, the internal examiner must attend the *viva voce* examination and agree with the external examiner, in the presence of the chair and in the absence of the scholar or supervisor, about the manner in which it is to be conducted.
» Assess the performance of the scholar in the *viva voce* examination (with the external examiner in the leading role).

12.2 External Examiners

The role of the external examiner is to examine the thesis, and where applicable the scholar in a *viva voce* examination, in an objective and timely manner; to liaise with the SPGS, the internal examiner and the chair where relevant; to ensure that RCSI regulations are followed and that the work is of the required standard. The principal purpose of an external examiner's visit to RCSI is to conduct the *viva voce* examination when required. Should the examiner engage in any other activities while at RCSI, these should take place after the examination to avoid any perceived conflict of interest.

Once an external examiner has agreed to examine a thesis, they should:

» Acknowledge receipt of the thesis.

» Ensure that the scholar demonstrates an adequate depth and breadth of knowledge and understanding of the field of study.
» Ensure that the scholar has gained expertise in basic and advanced methodologies and techniques.
» Ensure that the scholar can demonstrate that the work presented is their own.
» Conduct the thesis/*viva voce* examination in a rigorous manner. In a *viva voce* examination the internal examiner should conduct the *viva voce* examination in a non-aggressive manner, giving the scholar the opportunity to fully defend their thesis.
» Determine if the appropriate standard has been reached to merit the award of a Research degree and recommend a single category of award.
» Not contact the supervisor in relation to the thesis examination.
» Write a joint report with the external examiner of MD, PhD and DProf. awards on the thesis and the performance of the scholar at the *viva voce* examination, using the appropriate Joint Examiners' Viva Report form. Return this to the SPGS within 4 working days after the *viva voce* examination
» Not share thesis or *viva voce* examination reports with the supervisor or the scholar in advance of the *viva voce* examination.
» Where minor or major corrections are required, confirm in writing to the SPGS that any required corrections to the thesis, as a result of examination, are implemented.

» Agree to be bound by confidentiality and non-disclosure agreements, where protecting intellectual property merits it.
» When contacted by the SPGS, agree on a suitable date for the *viva voce* examination and indicate if there is any reason that they cannot attend an in-person *viva voce* examination
» Direct any questions about the examination process to the SPGS at postgraduateschool@rcsi.ie.
» Read the thesis in its entirety within the required timeframe and assess the work presented in the thesis by the scholar.
» Prepare a written report on the thesis using the appropriate External Examiner Report Thesis form and return it to the SPGS. Where a *viva voce* is required the form should be returned at least 7 days prior to the date of the *viva voce* examination. In these circumstances, the external examiner is allowed 8 weeks for the examination of a thesis. Where a *viva voce* is not required the external examiner has up to 4 weeks to return the form.
» Liaise with the internal examiner, only if necessary, when preparing the thesis report.
» Not share any thesis examination reports with the supervisor or the scholar in advance of the *viva voce* examination where a *viva voce* is required.
» Not contact the supervisor in relation to the thesis examination.
» Where a *viva voce* examination is required, the external examiner must attend the *viva voce*, and agree with the internal examiner, in the presence of the chairperson and in the absence of the scholar or supervisor, about the manner in which it is to be conducted.
» Assess the performance of the scholar in the *viva voce* examination where a *viva voce* is required.
» Ensure that for the award of the Research degree the scholar demonstrates an adequate depth and breadth of knowledge and understanding of the field of study.
» Ensure that the scholar has gained expertise in basic and advanced methodologies and techniques.
» Ensure that the scholar can demonstrate that the work presented is their own.
» Where a *viva voce* is required, the external examiner must conduct the *viva voce* examination in a rigorous, but non-aggressive manner, giving the scholar the opportunity to fully defend their thesis.

EXAMINATION

12. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF EXAMINERS (cont).

» Determine if the appropriate standard has been reached to merit the award of the relevant research degree and agree findings and category of award with the internal examiner.

» Inform the scholar of the recommended outcome on completion of the *viva voce* examination where a *viva voce* is required.

» Make clear in the report which examiner corrections, if any, the scholar is required to make in order to have their thesis approved. Return this to the SPGS as soon as possible.

» Not share any thesis examination reports with the supervisor or inform the scholar in advance of the recommended outcome on completion of the thesis examination.

» Not contact the supervisor in relation to the thesis examination.

» Write a joint report with the internal examiner on the thesis and the performance of the scholar at the *viva voce* examination using the appropriate Joint Examiners' Report. Make clear which examiner corrections, if any, the scholar is required to make in order to have their thesis approved. Return this, to the SPGS, within 4 days after the *viva voce* examination

» Where major corrections are required, confirm in writing to the SPGS that any required corrections to the thesis, as a result of examination, are implemented.

12.3 Independent Chair

Independent chairs play an important role in the *viva voce* examination process and are there to ensure that the *viva voce* examination is conducted according to RCSI regulations. Independent chairs must not take part in examining the scholar even when they have expertise in the subject area of the thesis. To avoid familiarity being prejudicial to objective judgement, chairs should be independent of the supervisor, the scholar and the examiners.

Once an independent chair has agreed to chair a *viva voce* examination, they must:

» Read the thesis examiner reports before the *viva voce* examination and discuss any causes for concern with the Head of SPGS or nominee before proceeding.

» Attend the pre *viva voce* examination meeting with the examiners and resolve any examination procedural questions that the examiners have before the scholar arrives.

» Ensure that the internal and external examiners agree on the procedure for the examination of the scholar.

» Attend the *viva voce* examination on the agreed date, chair it according to RCSI procedures and record observations if necessary.

» Introduce the scholar to each examiner and explain the status and role of the independent chair and the reason for record taking.

» Introduce any other person present in the *viva voce* examination for the purposes of training or observing procedure.

» Outline clearly the role of a supervisor, if present, as an observer.

» Advise the scholar that the outcome will not be communicated until after the *viva voce* examination and that they should not infer any decision of the examiners on the basis of the discussion in the *viva voce* examination.

» Return all relevant notes and completed forms to the SPGS after the *viva voce* examination.

» Ensure that an atmosphere exists in the *viva voce* examination which allows the scholar to perform to the best of their ability.

» Ensure that the *viva voce* examination is conducted in a fair, rigorous, reliable, consistent and non-aggressive manner.

» Intervene in the examining process only if they judge that the scholar is at risk of being treated unfairly, or if the behaviour of any of those present is otherwise deemed as prejudicial to the conclusion of a successful *viva voce* examination.

» Offer an interruption to the *viva voce* examination if circumstances warrant it, including the offer of a comfort break.

» Ensure that the supervisor, if present, leaves before the end of the *viva voce* examination when the scholar is offered an opportunity to add anything further in defence of their thesis.

» Ensure that the supervisor and scholar are not present during the examiners' deliberations.

» Ensure that the result is in full compliance with the RCSI and NUI regulations for the examination of an RCSI research award.

» Ensure that the scholar is informed of the outcome of the *viva voce* examination informally, while making it clear that the result is subject to approval by the RCSI and NUI examination boards.

» After the *viva voce* examination, obtain the views of the scholar and the examiners on the process and submit these to the SPGS as part of the independent chair's report.

» Complete the independent chair's report on the *viva voce* examination and return it to the SPGS within 4 days following the *viva voce* examination.

» Provide to the Head of SPGS, or nominee, any further required information in the event of a *viva voce* examination decision being inconclusive or in dispute.

12.3.1 Responsibilities of independent chair in a virtual/hybrid *viva voce* examination.

Where the *viva voce* examination is conducted in a virtual/hybrid format, the responsibilities of the independent chair are to:

» Preside over the *viva* proceedings in order to ensure consistency in the conduct of online/hybrid vivas using MS Teams and those conducted in-person.

» Ensure that any post *viva* decisions and comments are based solely on the candidate's performance and do not reflect issues related to the online/hybrid format of the *viva*.

» Provide an additional viewpoint if the conduct of the *viva* should become the subject of a student appeal.

» Confirm that all parties are comfortable with the arrangements and that the candidates and the examiners can see and hear each other clearly.

» Make clear the expectations indicating the likely duration, the ability of the candidate and examiners to request brief breaks if necessary, and ensuring that all parties have everything to hand that they require.

» Actively monitor the quality of the connection, and in the case of occasional breakdowns/pauses in either the video or the audio link ensure that any discussion is repeated and that no misunderstanding has occurred.

» Make the decision about whether the *viva* continues in the event of a serious or protracted breakdown in the connection of more than 20 minutes. However, if it is clear before 20 minutes elapse that re-connection cannot be made, the *viva* should be postponed.

» Make notes of what was covered during the *viva*, including any difficulties the candidate had in responding to questions, and whether this was due to the technology/format being used or lack of understanding.

In addition, the chair should:

» Know how to add people to an MS Teams meeting and remove the candidate (and supervisor as appropriate) at the required time to allow private discussion between the examination panel.

» Collect and hold telephone numbers of all parties for effective communication in case the *viva* has to be halted due to technical difficulties. These will be provided by SPGS.

» Confirm that all parties are in a suitable location (with adequate broadband capacity) and won't be disturbed.

» Put all parties at ease.

» Ensure that the duration of the *viva* is not excessive i.e. not longer than three hours.

» Inform the scholar that the SPGS will forward all post-*viva voce* documentation.

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13. EXAMINATION BOARDS AND GRADUATION

When all reports have been submitted by the chair and the examiners to the SPGS, the scholar is informed of the recommendation and given copies of all three examiner reports (External, Internal and Joint reports) and an email outlining the next steps including the deadline for submission of a revised thesis.

When the scholar completes the corrections, and submits a revised thesis, the supervisor must email the SPGS to confirm that they have oversee the implementation of the corrections and they are ready for the examiner(s) to review. If minor corrections are required, the internal examiner must approve these (with prior agreement from the external examiner); in the case of major corrections both examiners must approve them. Examiners submit their approval in writing (by email) to the SPGS. If one of the examiners is unable to review the final thesis (e.g. due to exceptional circumstances, illness, etc.), then when appropriate, the final review and decision rests with the remaining examiner(s).

Regardless of the level of corrections required, each scholar has one opportunity to implement all required corrections in the revised thesis. Failure to implement corrections to the satisfaction of the examiner(s), in a timely manner, will result in the degree not being awarded.

When the thesis has been approved, the scholar submits one hard-bound copy to the SPGS and one PDF version for inclusion in the RCSI repository. It is customary for scholars to make two extra hard-bound copies, one for themselves and one for their supervisor.

The SPGS makes the necessary arrangements for approval of the examiners' recommendation at the relevant Examination Boards meeting and for the scholar to graduate at the next available RCSI conferring ceremony. The hard-bound thesis must be submitted to SPGS prior to the NUI Exam board meeting. The degree conferred is awarded by RCSI and NUI.

14. CATEGORIES OF THESIS EXAMINATION DECISION

14.1 PhD/MD/DProf.

Listed below are the possible outcomes of the PhD, MD or DProf. examination. One of these must be selected by the panel of examiners. Scholars must complete all required corrections before submitting their revised thesis for examiner and Examination Board approval. Scholars must make all required corrections; if corrections are not completed to the satisfaction of the examiner(s) and Examination Board, the scholar's name cannot be brought forward to the Examination Boards and therefore the scholar will not be able to graduate.

I. Award without corrections
II. Award pending minor corrections
III. Award pending major corrections without a second *viva voce* examination
IV. Reject but permit submission of a revised thesis for repeat *viva voce* examination
V. Reject but award a lower degree
VI. Reject but award a lower degree subject to minor corrections
VII. Reject with no recommendation for re-submission

Pointers for arriving at the above decisions are given below.

I. Award without corrections – examiners select this category if the thesis is satisfactory in every way and there are no corrections to be made.

II. Award pending minor corrections – examiners select this category if they are satisfied that the thesis meets the criteria for the degree but some minor corrections are necessary. Minor corrections include, but are not limited to, typographical errors, minor amendments to text, references or diagrams and/or minor re-interpretation of the content. The scholar will receive both examiners' pre-*viva* reports, as well as the post-*viva* joint examiners report. In addition, one or both of the examiners may, as specified in the joint-examiners report, submit additional corrections at a later date. The scholar must return the corrected thesis within 4-8 weeks of receiving official notification of the outcome OR the final list of corrections from the examiners, whichever is later. The internal examiner checks the revised thesis

for implementation of the corrections, and approves the final document. If there are two external examiners, it must be agreed which examiner will take on this role.

III. Award pending major corrections to be verified by both examiners – examiners select this category if the thesis contains typographical or other errors so numerous as to interfere with the smooth reading of the thesis; is defective in presentation or detail; or requires further research.
A list of corrections implemented and the revised thesis must be approved by both examiners within six months of the scholar receiving official notification of the outcome. If the scholar has performed to the required standard at the *viva voce* examination, a second *viva voce* examination is not required.

IV. IV. Reject but permit submission of a revised thesis for repeat *viva voce* examination – examiners select this category if the deficiencies in presentation, research detail, interpretation or analysis are sufficiently serious to prohibit an award being recommended and a second *viva voce* examination is required. The revised thesis must be submitted for re-examination by both examiners within twelve months of the scholar receiving official notification of the outcome. The option of a repeat *viva voce* examination can only be offered once. Scholars can only have a maximum of two *viva voce* examinations. If the examiners at the repeat *viva voce* examination are not satisfied that the work done, as represented in the thesis, is of the standard required they must choose from categories V, VI and VII above.

V. Reject but award a lower degree – examiners select this category in the case of work being of insufficient standard for a PhD, MD or DProf. but of sufficient standard for a specified lower degree for which a *viva voce* examination is not required. The scholar must resubmit the thesis with a new title page indicating that it is for a specified level 9 award. The resubmitted thesis must be approved by the internal examiner

within 4-8 weeks of the scholar receiving official notification of the original outcome.

VI. Reject but award a lower degree subject to minor corrections – examiners select this category in the case of work being of insufficient standard for a PhD, MD or DProf. but of sufficient standard for a specified lower degree after typographical and other specified corrections have been made. A *viva voce* examination is not required for a lower degree. The scholar must submit a revised thesis incorporating the required corrections and a new title page indicating that it is for a specified level 9 award. The revised thesis must be approved by the internal examiner within 4-8 weeks of the scholar receiving official notification of the outcome.

VII. Reject with no recommendation for re-submission – this category is recommended in the case of work which is insufficient for a PhD, MD, DProf. or a level 9 award. Examiners should only select this option when they are aware that the scholar has been given sufficient opportunity and supervisory support to enable them to submit a quality thesis for examination. This decision should not be selected unless a scholar has been afforded a second opportunity to defend their thesis.

14.2 MSc/MCh

Listed below are the possible outcomes of the MSc/MCh examination. One of these must be selected by the panel of examiners. At the discretion of the external examiner, a scholar may be required to attend a *viva voce* examination.

I. Award without corrections
I. Award pending minor corrections
I. Award pending major corrections to be verified by both examiners
I. Reject and permit submission of a revised thesis
I. Reject with no recommendation for re-submission

Pointers for arriving at the above decisions are given below.

I. Award without corrections – examiners select this category if the thesis is satisfactory in every

EXAMINATION

14. CATEGORIES OF THESIS EXAMINATION DECISION (cont).

way and there are no corrections to be made

II. *Award pending minor corrections* – examiners select this category if they are satisfied that the thesis meets the criteria for the degree but some minor corrections are necessary. Minor corrections include, but are not limited to: typographical errors, minor amendments to text, references or diagrams and/or minor re-interpretation of the content. A list of corrections and the revised thesis must be approved by the internal examiner within 4-8 weeks of the scholar receiving official notification of the outcome.

III. *Award pending major corrections to be verified by both examiners* – examiners select this category if the thesis contains typographical or other errors so numerous as to interfere with the smooth reading of the thesis; is defective in presentation or detail; or requires further research. A list of corrections implemented and the revised thesis must be approved by both examiners within six months of the scholar receiving official notification of the outcome.

IV. *Reject and permit submission of a revised thesis* – examiners select this category if the deficiencies in presentation, research detail, interpretation or analysis are sufficiently serious to prohibit an award being recommended. The revised thesis must be submitted for re-examination by both examiners within twelve months of the scholar receiving official notification of the original outcome.

V. *Reject with no recommendation for re-submission* – this category is recommended in the case of work which is of insufficient standard for an MSc/MCh. Examiners should only select this final option when they are aware that the scholar has been given sufficient opportunity and supervisory support to enable them to submit a quality thesis for examination. This decision should not be selected unless a scholar has been afforded a second opportunity to defend their thesis.

15 REACHING A UNANIMOUS DECISION BETWEEN INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

15.1 PhD/MD/DProf.

In the event of the internal and external examiners not immediately agreeing on the outcome of the examination, they should try to resolve issues by reasoned, detailed discussion. The external examiner's view normally carries greater weight in such discussions. The role of the independent chair in facilitating an agreed decision on the day of the *viva voce* examination is very important. Concerns about practical issues such as travel plans of the external examiner and additional time required may need to be taken into account as early as possible.

If it is not possible for the examiners to reach a mutually agreed decision, they must submit separate reports to the Head of the SPGS who will bring the matter to the attention of the SPGS Committee. This committee will suggest an appropriate way forward, taking account of the individual circumstances of the case. Options may include the appointment of a second, RCSI and NUI-approved external examiner to assist in resolving the disagreement. However, this should be considered as a last resort option only and every effort should be made to reach a resolution as quickly as possible, in order to minimise the impact of non-resolution on the scholar.

15.2 MSc/MCh

In the event of the internal and external examiners not immediately agreeing on the outcome of the examination, they should try to resolve issues by reasoned, detailed discussion. The external examiner's view normally carries greater weight in such discussions.If it is not possible for the examiners to reach an agreed decision, their separate reports will be considered by the Head of the SPGS who will bring the matter to the attention of the SPGS Committee.

This committee will suggest an appropriate way forward, taking account of the individual circumstances of the case. Options may include the appointment of suitable, alternative examiners to assist in resolving the disagreement. However, this should be considered as a last resort option only and every effort should be made to reach a resolution as quickly as possible, in order to minimise the impact of non-resolution on the scholar.

16. SCHOLAR'S RIGHT OF APPEAL

A scholar has the right to appeal the decision of the examiners if there is evidence of apparent substantive procedural irregularity. To do so, scholars should follow the RCSI Appeals Regulations, available on Moodle.

17. RESPONSIBILITIES OF SPGS

The SPGS is the RCSI facilitator of the research awards and examination processes. It liaises with scholars, supervisors, examiners and, in the case of *viva voce* examinations, the independent chairs to ensure that RCSI thesis examination regulations are fit for purpose and followed for each thesis examination including *viva voce* examinations. The SPGS facilitates the smooth operation of the administration surrounding the examination procedures, including the following:

» Advertising examiner nomination deadlines in ample time.

» Reviewing examiner nominations and seeking their approval at the SPGS Committee, Academic Council, Medicine and Health Sciences Board and NUI.

» Informing supervisors of the outcome of examiner nominations after approval by the above governance.

» Informing the internal examiner of approval of their appointment.

» Advising scholars of deadlines for thesis submission.

» Sending theses to the approved examiners within a reasonable time.

» Informing examiners of the RCSI regulations and deadlines for submission of reports.

» Arranging the examination after a thesis has been distributed to the examiners.

» Arranging the *viva voce* examination, when required, after a thesis has been distributed to the examiners, including booking an appropriate room on campus.

» Nominating the independent chair for the *viva voce* examination when required.

» Advising scholars of procedures for the thesis examination including *viva voce* procedures when required.

» Informing the scholar of the examiners' recommendation and outlining the next steps.

» Assisting external examiners with travel and accommodation requirements according to RCSI Travel Policy.

» Processing examiner payments and expense claims and forwarding them to the RCSI Finance Department after receipt of all necessary documentation from the external examiner.

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17. RESPONSIBILITIES OF SPGS (cont).

» Arranging examiner payments through the NUI after receipt of all necessary documentation from the external examiner.
» Arranging RCSI and NUI examination board approval of successful scholars.
» Forwarding scholar details to the RCSI Registry for preparation of parchments.
» Forwarding scholar details to the RCSI Communications Department for graduation.
» Collecting the views of all stakeholders on the examination process.

18. RESPONSIBILITIES OF SCHOLARS

Scholars must take ownership of their studies. This includes responsibility for their annual review(s) where applicable, as well as the preparation, submission and defence of their final thesis.

» A scholar must be a registered RCSI scholar and must have been on the register for the minimum length of time specified for their research degree.
» Scholars must maintain continuous registration or follow official university procedure for requesting a Leave of Absence.
» All fees must have been paid for each year of registration.
» The scholar must use their RCSI scholar email for all official communication with the university.
» The scholar must respond to official communication from the university in a timely fashion.
» The scholar must be compliant with the Postgraduate Scholar Agreement, Code of Conduct, Academic Integrity Policy and all RCSI policies and procedures.
» The scholar must obtain the agreement of their supervisor for the thesis to be submitted for examination.
» The research described in the thesis must be the scholar's own personal effort.
» The research must not have been used to obtain a degree in RCSI or elsewhere by the scholar or someone else.
» Where content presented in the thesis is the result of collaborative research this must be duly acknowledged in the text, clearly indicating how much of the work is the scholar's own.
» The scholar must take reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and, to the best of their knowledge, does not breach copyright law, and has not been taken from other sources except where these have been cited and acknowledged within the text.
» The scholar must include in their Thesis Acknowledgement Section any source of funding for their research and refer to the funding agency for specific wording that may be required.
» The scholar must include in the relevant section, details of any Research Ethics Committee(s) approval and/or animal license required for the research.
» The scholar must ensure that the thesis follows the Thesis Presentation Regulations accurately.
» The scholar must submit a PDF of their soft-bound version of their thesis plus one completed Examination Entry form by email to the SPGS. The scholar may also be asked to submit two physical copies of the soft-bound thesis to the SPGS.
» The scholar must include a Scholar Thesis Declaration in each copy of the soft-bound version of their thesis and sign each copy on submission.
» Where a *viva voce* is required, the scholar must attend the *viva voce* examination and defend their thesis to the best of their ability.
» Where a *viva voce* is required, the scholar must deliver a 20 minute presentation, for example by PowerPoint, on the work of their thesis at the beginning of their *viva voce* examination, adhering to the Guidelines for *viva voce* Presentation.
» The scholar must complete any required corrections to the satisfaction of the examiner(s) within the allotted time frame. They must first allow sufficient time for their supervisors to check the changes made before submitting the corrected final version of the thesis.
» The scholar must address all required corrections in a revised thesis; failure to do so will result in the degree not being awarded.
» The scholar may contact the internal examiner only when submitting a revised thesis. If there is uncertainty about thesis corrections, the supervisor should liaise with the internal examiner, but not the external examiner, to seek clarification.
» The scholar is responsible for ensuring that the thesis is submitted in the appropriate format. Scholars should submit a single electronic copy (PDF) of the revised thesis (after final approval by their supervisor). The scholar may also be asked for a physical soft-bound copy of their revised thesis.
» These should clearly highlight all changes made and be accompanied by a cover letter addressing each individual examiner's recommendation and identifying page numbers where changes have been implemented. All changes should be highlighted or tracked throughout the revised thesis submission.
» Examiners will then be asked to submit their final recommendation (either Award or Reject) to the School of Postgraduate Studies. Generally,
the internal examiner is tasked with the final examination and approval of the corrections, but this needs to be explicitly agreed by both examiners at the *viva voce* examination.
» The scholar must insert the RCSI standard IP Declaration on only one page at the beginning of each copy of the soft-bound version of their thesis.
» The scholar must remove the RCSI standard IP Declaration from the final, approved version of the thesis, which becomes the public record of the thesis.
» The scholar must submit a hard-bound copy and an electronic copy ONLY when approved to do so.
» The scholar must include a Scholar Thesis Declaration in their hard-bound copy of the approved thesis and sign it on submission.
» The scholar must complete the Copyright and Thesis Distribution Request when submitting the approved, hard-bound version of their thesis. This thesis copy should be bound in RCSI maroon, pantone 208.
» The scholar must submit a PDF version of the approved thesis for inclusion in the RCSI repository. This version must include an electronic signature on the scholar thesis declaration.

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19. THESIS AVAILABILITY POLICY

It is RCSI policy that a thesis or dissertation produced in the pursuit of a higher degree by research should be made available publicly for the purposes of research or study, subject to IP protection. In addition, reasonable quotation from such a thesis or dissertation may be made provided that the source of the information is properly acknowledged. This policy applies to all forms in which the thesis or dissertation is made available, including electronic format.

19.1 Restrictions on Thesis Availability

RCSI recognises that scholars or their collaborators in the research project may not wish to make the thesis or dissertation immediately available publicly. Circumstances that merit a restriction or embargo on the public availability of a thesis or dissertation include the following:

» Access will endanger protection of intellectual property rights (including opportunity to publish or make patent application).

» The research uses personal sources and/or contains sensitive information that was obtained on condition that the information not be disclosed or would violate General Data Protection Legislation (including the Health Research Regulation).

» It contains commercially sensitive material that will breach prior contractual arrangements with an outside organisation.

» Restriction on availability is necessary to ensure compliance with the law or protection of national interests or public safety.

» Where the embargo of a thesis or dissertation is due to requirements from a collaborating partner in the research, the length of time of the embargo should be determined and agreed between all relevant parties at the beginning of the research project.

The requirement for an embargo must be taken into consideration when recommending and appointing external examiners for the thesis or dissertation. It is the supervisor's responsibility to inform the SPGS of the need to obtain the external examiner's agreement to maintain strict confidentiality regarding the contents of the thesis or dissertation.

19.2 Making a Thesis Publicly Available

A thesis or dissertation must be made available publicly after successful completion of the appropriate examination and graduation. The candidate is required to sign a Copyright and Thesis Distribution Request. The supervisor must counter- sign the restriction on distribution of thesis request. The candidate deposits a hard-bound copy to the School of Postgraduate Studies, RCSI in advance of graduation. Any request for restriction on thesis distribution must be attached to the title page of all hard-bound copies of the thesis. Simultaneously, the candidate is advised to upload a PDF version of the final approved thesis to the RCSI Library site.

PROGRAMME OVERVIEWS

20. PhD SUMMARY

SCHOLAR ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA	Academic	BSc Hons (>= 2.1)	MSc(research)	or equivalent
	English language	https://www.rcsi.com/dublin/postgraduate/policies-and-guidelines/english-language-requirements
MINIMUM REGISTRATION	3 or 4 years (full time)	5 years (part time)	
MAXIMUM REGISTRATION	6 years (full time)	8 years (part time)	
THESIS LENGTH	Maximum 100,000 words	
THESIS OPTIONS	1. Thesis by Classical Route 2. Thesis by Publication	

YEAR MINUS 1	Find supervisor	www.rcsi.ie/research
	Project Proposal	www.rcsi.com/dublin/postgraduate/postgraduate-research/doctor-of-philosophy/apply
	Confirm place	After offer from SPGS, registration complete

YEAR 1	Compulsory core modules [15 ECTS]	Postgraduate Essentials Research Ethics and Integrity Critical Analysis, Writing & Communication Skills Biostatistics for Research Postgraduates RCSI Academy Integrity Module
	Annual progress review	Scholar submits it in Moodle (month 10)
	Mini-viva	Scholar presents to review panel (month 11)

YEAR 2	Confirm place	After SPGS 'roll-over', this completes registration
	Annual progress review	Scholar submits it in Moodle (month 10)
	Mini-viva	Scholar presents to review panel (month 11)

YEAR 3	Confirm place	After SPGS 'roll-over', this completes registration
	Examiner nomination	PI submits to SPGS 6 months prior to year end
	Soft-bound thesis	Scholar submits thesis to SPGS at year end
	viva voce	Scholar presents to examination panel
	Hard-bound copy	Final thesis, 1 week prior to NUI exam board

YEAR 4+	Graduation	June or November

20.1 Structured Taught Modules

Structured taught modules have been designed to enable efficient and appropriate PhD training in select relevant topics. All PhD candidates must complete the following to be eligible to submit their final PhD Thesis for examination:

» all four core modules plus the RCSI Academic Integrity module [PC01-04, see Moodle SPGS pages and Section 5 above]

» An annual review every year until the softbound version of the thesis is submitted

In addition, all outstanding fees need to be paid, examiners need to be nominated and approved, the Thesis Declaration signed and inserted into the thesis and a Thesis Submission form signed by the supervisor and submitted as a loose sheet of paper in the soft-bound copy.

20.2 Classical thesis format

Both the 'Classical' and 'PhD by Publication' thesis formats follow the same formatting guidelines. See the Moodle SPGS section (Thesis tab) for detailed instructions.

The key difference between the formats is the arrangement and content. Instructions for the 'Classical' format are in section 4 of the guidelines, while the 'PhD by Publication' format is in Section 5.

20.3 PhD by Publication

For the PhD by Publication, the guidelines for preparation of the thesis will differ from above, but all other elements of scholar registration, progression and examination will remain the same.

20.3.1 Guide for Eligibility

Candidates who are in their third or subsequent year on the RCSI PhD register are eligible to apply to be examined by this route. A guide for eligibility is that candidates should have published papers or have papers accepted for publication during their time on the RCSI PhD register, in journals ranked in the first or second quartiles (Q1 or Q2) in their respective fields. Journal Quartile rankings are obtained from the Scopus journal rank tool: http://www.scimagojr.com/journalrank.php
To be eligible for consideration for a PhD by publication,

candidates should:

» be 1st author on 2 data-based research papers, 1 of which may be a systematic review (already published or accepted) in quality peer-reviewed journals ranked Q1 or Q2 in the relevant field AND

» be co-author on 1-2 data-based research papers (already published or accepted) in quality peer-reviewed journals ranked Q1 or Q2 in the relevant field OR

» have authorship status deemed by the PhD by Publication Dissertation Committee and subsequently by the external and internal examiners to be at least equivalent to the above.

In exceptional circumstances e.g. if a scholar is 1st author on a paper in a very highly ranked journal such as Nature, the PhD by Publication Dissertation Committee may allow consideration of a PhD submission containing fewer than the above number of publications.

20.3.2 Application for Examination

» Submission for PhD examination may normally be made following a minimum of 3 years' registration on the RCSI PhD Register. As with the standard PhD thesis, candidates must complete their theses within 6 years (full time) or 8 years (part time).

» The supervisor should submit examiner nominations approximately 6 months in advance of the date the scholar plans to submit their thesis.

20.3.3 Thesis Format and Eligibility

Candidates are required to submit a PDF copy of their soft-bound version of the thesis. This must be emailed to postgraduateschool@rcsi.ie. Scholars may also be requested to submit two physical copies of their soft-bound thesis.

The published papers cannot alone constitute the thesis; there must be a narrative description of the work that connects the publications, producing a cohesive, unitary dissertation, documenting a single programme of research, completed by the candidate while registered for a PhD degree.

A doctoral candidate must indicate their department at RCSI as their address on each scientific article they publish.

Please refer to the Thesis Presentation Guidelines document on Moodle.

PROGRAMME OVERVIEWS

20. PhD SUMMARY (cont)

a. Thesis Presentation

Just as in the classical PhD thesis format, the thesis must be presented as a unified whole with respect to font size, line spacing, margin sizes, section headings, index and page numbers. However the bibliography contained in the published papers does not need to be reproduced in the final thesis bibliography unless the citations are mentioned in the narrative part of the thesis. The thesis must conform to all other requirements (and be in line with RCSI Thesis Guidelines, these are available on Moodle).

The PhD by Publication thesis will be judged by the examiners as a unified, logically-coherent document in the same way a traditional thesis is judged. Publication or acceptance for publication of research results before presentation of the thesis in no way supersedes RCSI's evaluation and judgment of the work during the thesis examination process (i.e. it does not guarantee that the thesis will be found acceptable for the degree).

b. Third-Party Copyright

Candidates must identify all material in their theses that is subject to third party copyright. Material subject to third-party copyright includes, for example, diagrams, tables, figures created by another author and inserted in the thesis to illustrate an argument. Candidates will need to obtain permission from the copyright owner to include this material in their theses before it is published online. Candidates should seek such permissions in good time, and well in advance of final submission. A copy of the final, approved thesis must be uploaded to the RCSI Institutional Repository.

A version of the published papers should be uploaded to the Repository as they are published, subject to publisher copyright policies. Within the thesis upload, to avoid a breach of third-party copyright, the published papers will be provided as a weblink. This can be a reference to the e-publications@ RCSI record, the DOI, or the published journal web address for the article. All other components of the thesis, (title, acknowledgements, abstract, introduction, written statements for each publication discussion, bibliography, supplementary appendices) must be submitted within the upload. Help and advice on publisher permissions and uploading is available from epubs@rcsi.ie and the library.

20.3.4 Examination Process

All elements of the thesis examination follow the same processes as are used for the Classical PhD examination.

20.4 PhD by Prior Publication

This route to a PhD allows scholars who have sufficient research experience at doctoral level, as demonstrated through already published material, to gain academic recognition for their work over a minimum registration period of one year. Researchers who have published their own original research, which examiners deem has made a significant contribution to knowledge, can obtain a PhD award in recognition of this work when it is presented in the form of a coherent thesis and successfully assessed in a *viva voce* examination

SCHOLAR ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA	Academic	BSc Hons or equivalent
	Other	Have been actively engaged in medical or health sciences research for a period of at least five years within the last ten years at an organization that has a recognized research function. Have published and be senior author (first or last author) on a minimum of five original research papers in journals ranked Q1 in their relevant fields in the ten years prior to the date of application for admission. Work in preparation for publication will not be considered, the work must be already published or in press
MINIMUM REGISTRATION	1 year	
THESIS LENGTH	Maximum 100,000 words	
PROGRAMME REQUIREMENTS	Research Ethics training (Recognition of Prior Learning may be considered if evidence of equivalent learning can be provided). 6 months in advance of thesis submission, scholars should complete the PhD by Prior Publication Thesis Completion Plan (available on Moodle)	
EXAMINATION	Final thesis and *viva voce* examination	

PROGRAMME OVERVIEWS

21. MD SUMMARY

SCHOLAR ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA	Academic	MB BCh BAO plus a minimum of 1 year internship
	English language	IELTS >= 6.5 (www.rcsi.com/dublin/postgraduate/policies-and-guidelines/english-language-requirements)
MINIMUM REGISTRATION	2 years (full time) | 4 years (part time)	
MAXIMUM REGISTRATION	4 years (full time) | 8 years (part time)	
THESIS LENGTH	Maximum 100,000 words	
THESIS OPTIONS	1. Thesis by Classical Route 2. Thesis by Publication	

YEAR -1	Project Proposal	https://www.rcsi.com/dublin/postgraduate/postgraduate-research/doctor-of-medicine/apply
	Confirm place	After offer from SPGS, registration complete

YEAR 1	Compulsory modules	Research Ethics and Integrity Postgraduate Essentials RCSI Academity Integrity Module
	Optional modules *	Critical Analysis, Writing & Communication Skills Biostatistics for Research Postgraduates
	Early Stage Review	Scholar does a group presentation to an invited panel (January)
	Annual progress review	Scholar submits it in Moodle (month 10) (Early stage and late stage reviews where the scholar presents their research to a panel are also required.)
	Mini-viva	Scholar presents to review panel (month 11)

YEAR 2	Confirm place	After SPGS 'roll-over', this completes registration for year 2
	Late stage Review	Scholar does a group presentation to an invited panel (January)
	Examiner nomination	Supervisor submits to SPGS (month 6)
	Soft-bound thesis	Scholar submits thesis to SPGS at year end
	Viva voce	Scholar presents to examination panel
	Hard-bound copy	Final thesis, 1 week prior to NUI exam board (~3 weeks prior to Graduation)

YEAR 3+	Graduation	June or November

*These modules are compulsory for MD scholars completing their research in Bahrain.

21.1 Structured Taught Modules

Structured taught modules have been designed to enable efficient and appropriate MD training in select relevant topics. All MD candidates must complete the following to be eligible to submit their final MD Thesis for examination:

» Compulsory modules PC01, PC04 and Academic Integrity (MD scholars completing their research in Bahrain must also complete PC02 and PC03). See Moodle SPGS pages and Section 5 above.

» Annual Review reports (early, annual and late reviews)

» In addition, all outstanding fees need to be paid, examiners need to be nominated and approved, the Thesis Declaration signed and inserted into the thesis and a Thesis Submission form signed by the supervisor and submitted as a loose sheet of paper in the softbound copy.

21.2 Eligibility Guide for MD Thesis by Publication

Scholars who are in their second or subsequent year on the MD register are eligible to apply to be examined by this route. Candidates should have published papers or have papers accepted for publication during their time on the MD register, in journals ranked in the first or second quartiles (Q1 or Q2) in their respective fields. Journal Quartile rankings are obtained from the Scopus journal rank tool: http://www.scimagojr.com/journalrank.php.

To be eligible scholars should:

» be 1st author on two data-based research papers (already published or accepted for publication) in journals which are ranked Q1 or Q2 in the relevant field (joint first authorship is accepted)

or

» in exceptional circumstances e.g. if a candidate is 1st author on a paper in a highly ranked journal such as the Lancet or Nature, the MD by Publication Dissertation Committee may allow consideration of an MD submission containing just one publication

Please note that these papers must be original data-based research, and only one systematic review can be included to meet these requirements.

RCSI should be named as the candidate's primary affiliation on both manuscripts.

21.2.1 Application for Examination

Submission for MD (by publication) examination may normally be made following a minimum of 2 years' registration on the RCSI MD Register. As with the standard MD thesis, candidates must complete their theses within 4 years (full time) or 8 years (part time).

» The supervisor should submit examiner nominations approximately 6 months in advance of the date the scholar plans to submit the softbound version of their thesis.

21.2.2 Thesis Format and Eligibility

Candidates are required to submit a PDF copy of their soft-bound version of the thesis. This must be emailed to postgraduateschool@rcsi.ie. Scholars may also be requested to submit two physical copies of their soft-bound thesis.

The published papers cannot alone constitute the thesis; there must be a narrative description of the work that connects the publications, producing a cohesive, unitary dissertation, documenting a single programme of research, completed by the candidate while registered for an MD degree. A doctoral candidate must indicate their department at RCSI as their address on each scientific article they publish.

The MD by Publication thesis will be judged by the examiners as a unified, logically-coherent document in the same way a traditional thesis is judged. Publication or acceptance for publication of research results before presentation of the thesis in no way supersedes RCSI's evaluation and judgment of the work during the thesis examination process (i.e. it does not guarantee that the thesis will be found acceptable for the degree).

Information on the structure of the thesis is contained in section 5 of the Thesis Presentation Guidelines

21.2.3 Third-Party Copyright

Candidates must identify all material in their thesis that is subject to third party copyright. Material subject to third-party copyright includes, for example, diagrams, tables, figures created by another author and inserted in the thesis to illustrate an argument. Candidates will need to obtain permission from the copyright owner to include this material in their thesis before it is published

PROGRAMME OVERVIEWS

online. Candidates should seek such permissions in good time, and well in advance of final submission. A copy of the final, approved thesis must be uploaded to the RCSI Institutional Repository.

A version of the published papers should be uploaded to the Repository as they are published, subject to publisher copyright policies. Within the thesis upload, to avoid a breach of third-party copyright, the published papers will be provided as a weblink. This can be a reference to the RCSI repository record, the DOI, or the published journal web address for the article. All other components of the thesis, (title, acknowledgements, abstract, introduction, written statements for each publication discussion, bibliography, supplementary appendices) must be submitted within the upload. Help and advice on publisher permissions and uploading is available from the library.

21.2.4 Examination
All elements of the thesis examination follow the same processes as are used for the Classical MD examination.

21.3 MD by Prior Publication
This route to an MD allows scholars who have sufficient research experience at doctoral level, as demonstrated through already published material, to gain academic recognition for their work over a minimum registration period of one year.

Researchers who have published their own original research, which examiners deem has made a significant contribution to knowledge, can obtain an MD award in recognition of this work when it is presented in the form of a coherent thesis and successfully assessed in a *viva voce* examination.

SCHOLAR ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA	Academic	Hold and have obtained the degrees of MB BAO BCh
	Other	Have been actively engaged in medical, surgical, clinical or health sciences research for a period of at least five years within the last ten years at an organization that has a recognized research function.
		Have published and be senior author (first or last author) on a minimum of 3 data-based original research papers in journals ranked Q1 or Q2 in their relevant fields in the ten years prior to the date of application for admission.
		Work in preparation for publication will not be considered, the work must be already published or in press
MINIMUM REGISTRATION	1 year	
THESIS LENGTH	Maximum 100,000 words	
PROGRAMME REQUIREMENTS	Research Ethics training (Recognition of Prior Learning may be considered if evidence of equivalent learning can be provided) RCSI Academic Integrity module	
THESIS COMPLETION PLAN	6 months in advance of thesis submission, scholars should complete the Prior Publication Thesis Completion Plan (available on Moodle)	
EXAMINATION	Final thesis and *viva voce* examination	

PROGRAMME OVERVIEWS

22. DProf. SUMMARY

SCHOLAR ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA	Academic	2.1 Honours degree (or equivalent) or an MSc degree
	Professional	Applicants must have at least 5 years professional experience at a senior level in their profession and where applicable, must be registered with the relevant professional body in Ireland.
	English Language	IELTS >= 6.5 https://www.rcsi.com/dublin/postgraduate/policies-and-guidelines/english-language-requirements
MINIMUM REGISTRATION	3 years (FTE)	
MAXIMUM REGISTRATION	6 years (FTE)	
THESIS LENGTH	45,000 – 60,000 words	

YEAR -1	Find supervisor	www.rcsi.ie/research
	Workplace advisor	Agree with your line manager in your workplace that you will have time ring-fenced for the programme and access to the supports you need in your workplace.
	Project Proposal	500 word research proposal to be submitted as part of application
	Submit Application	Submit your application through the Quercus online application system
	Interview	An interview will form part of the application process

YEAR 1	Compulsory core modules [30 ETCS]	Systematic Review For Evidence Appraisal And Synthesis Advanced Research Methods Research Ethics And Integrity Leadership Development
	Early stage progress review	Post 6 months presentation on progress to date and future plans
	Annual progress review	Comprehensive presentation and written report after 12 months
	Progression Exam Board	End of year 1

YEAR 2	Confirm place	After SPGS "roll over", this completes registration
	Annual progress review	End of year progress review

YEAR 3	Confirm place	After SPGS "roll over", this completes registration
	Examiner nominations	PI submits to SPGS 6 months prior to year end
	Soft-bound thesis	Scholar submits thesis to SPGS at year end
	Viva voce	Scholar presents to review panel (month 11)
	Hard-bound copy	Final thesis, 1 week prior to NUI exam board

YEAR 4+	Graduation	June or November

The professional doctorate at RCSI is practitioner-led research that incorporates academic and professional knowledge.

22.1 Taught Modules
Year 1 of the programme requires successful completion of 4 taught modules plus the RCSI Academic Integrity module. These modules are designed to help formulate and plan the research project. In-person attendance is required as outlined in the Professional Doctorates handbook. In addition, an Annual Review must be successfully completed to ensure progress to the second and subsequent years of the programme until the scholar submits the softbound version of their thesis. This review should focus on:
» Introduction and background to your research project
» Hypothesis and aims of the project
» Methodology
» Key findings to date
» Future work plans

As well as completing the taught elements of the programme, scholars will also need to meet regularly with their RCSI supervisor to ensure they are meeting the programme milestones.

22.2 Exit Award
Scholars who successfully complete all 4 taught modules within the required timeframe and who do not wish to progress their studies, can exit the programme with an Advanced Certificate in Applied Research Practices. Scholars who wish to exit the programme must inform the SPGS in advance of the Progression Exam Board as this Board will have to ratify the award of the Certificate.

22.3 Fees
All fees need to be paid annually.

PROGRAMME OVERVIEWS

23. MSc SUMMARY

SCHOLAR ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA	Academic	BSc Hons (>= 2.2) | or equivalent
	English language	IELTS >= 6.5 (www.rcsi.com/dublin/postgraduate/policies-and-guidelines/english-language-requirements)
MINIMUM REGISTRATION	1 year (full time) | 2 years (part time)	
MAXIMUM REGISTRATION	2 years (full time) | 4 years (part time)	
THESIS LENGTH	20,000 to 60,000 words	

YEAR -1	Find supervisor	www.rcsi.com/dublin/research-and-innovation/research
	Project Proposal	https://www.rcsi.com/dublin/postgraduate/postgraduate-research/master-of-science/apply
	Confirm place	After offer from SPGS, registration complete

YEAR 1	Compulsory modules	Postgraduate Essentials Research Ethics and Integrity RCSI Academic Integrity
	Optional modules	Critical Analysis, Writing & Communication Skills Biostatistics for Research Postgraduates
	Examiner nomination	Supervisor submits to SPGS (month 6)
	Soft-bound thesis	Scholar submits thesis to SPGS at year end
	Hard-bound copy	Final thesis, 1 week prior to NUI exam board (~3 weeks prior to Graduation)

YEAR 2+	Graduation	June or November

24. MCh SUMMARY

SCHOLAR ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA	Academic	MB BCh BAO plus 1 year internship
	English language	IELTS >= 6.5 (www.rcsi.com/dublin/postgraduate/policies-and-guidelines/english-language-requirements)
MINIMUM REGISTRATION	1 year (full time) | 2 years (part time)	
MAXIMUM REGISTRATION	2 years (full time) | 4 years (part time)	
THESIS LENGTH	20,000 to 60,000 words	

YEAR -1	Find supervisor	www.rcsi.com/dublin/research-and-innovation/research
	Project Proposal	https://www.rcsi.com/dublin/postgraduate/postgraduate-research/master-of-surgery/apply
	Confirm place	After offer from SPGS, registration complete

YEAR 1	Compulsory modules	Postgraduate Essentials Research Ethics and Integrity RCSI Academic Integrity
	Optional modules	Critical Analysis, Writing & Communication Skills Biostatistics for Research Postgraduates
	Examiner nomination	Supervisor submits to SPGS (month 6)
	Soft-bound thesis	Scholar submits thesis to SPGS at year end
	Hard-bound copy	Final thesis, 1 week prior to NUI exam board (~3 weeks prior to Graduation)

YEAR 2+	Graduation	June or November

APPENDICES

25. REFERENCES

1. National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)
   http://www.nfq.ie/nfq/en/

2. European Qualifications Framework (EQF)
   http://ec.europa.eu/education/pub/pdf/general/eqf/leaflet_en.pdf

3. "A Guide to Designing University Awards for Inclusion in the National Framework of Qualifications: Issues around the Design of Programmes and the Use and Assessment of Learning Outcomes"
   http://www.nfqnetwork.ie/A_Guide_to_designing_UNiversity_Awards_for_Inclusion_in_the_National_Framework_of_Qualifications/Default.132.html

4. National Framework for Doctoral Education (Revised 2023)
   https://hea.ie/policy/research-policy/national-framework-for-doctoral-education/

5. Framework of Good Practice for Research Degree Programmes (2019)
   https://www.qqi.ie/sites/default/files/media/file-uploads/Ireland%E2%80%99s%20Framework%20of%20Good%20Practice%20Research%20Degree%20Programmes.pdf

6. Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for Providers of Research Degree Programmes (March 2017)
   https://www.qqi.ie/sites/default/files/media/file-uploads/Research%20Degree%20Programmes%20QA%20Guidelines.pdf

7. Policy Statement on Ensuring Research Integrity in Ireland (2019)
   https://www.iua.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/IUA_Research_Integrity_in_Ireland_Report_2019.pdf

8. Best Practices for PhD Training (2020). A publication by ORPHEUS (ORganisation for PhD Education in Biomedicine and Health Science in the EUropean System). Can be found on the orpheus website www.orpheus-med.org

9. Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy (2022)
   https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/27c78-impact-2030-irelands-new-research-and-innovation-strategy/

26. NATIONAL FRAMEWORK OF QUALIFICATIONS COMPARISON TABLE

NFQ	LEVEL 8	LEVEL 9	LEVEL 10
QUALIFICATIONS	Honours Bachelor (BSc/BA) Higher Diploma	Masters Degree (MSc/MCh) Postgraduate Diploma	Doctoral Degree (PhD/MD)
KNOWLEDGE - Breadth	An understanding of the theory, concepts and methods pertaining to a field (or fields) of learning	A systematic understanding of knowledge, at, or informed by, the forefront of a field of learning	A systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of a field of learning
KNOWLEDGE - Kind	Detailed knowledge and understanding in one or more specialised areas, some of it at the current boundaries of the field(s)	A critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, generally informed by the forefront of a field of learning	The creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research, or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy review by peers
KNOW-HOW & SKILL - Range	Demonstrate mastery of a complex and specialised area of skills and tools; Use and modify advanced skills and tools to conduct closely guided research, professional or advanced technical activity	Demonstrate a range of standard and specialized research or equivalent tools and techniques of enquiry	Demonstrate a significant range of the principal skills, techniques, tools, practices and/or materials which are associated with a field of learning; Develop new skills, techniques, tools, practices and/or materials
KNOW-HOW & SKILL - Selectivity	Exercise appropriate judgement in a number of complex planning, design, technical and/or management functions related to products, services, operations or processes, including resourcing	Select from complex and advanced skills across a field of learning; Develop new skills to a high level, including novel and emerging techniques	Respond to abstract problems that expand and redefine existing procedural knowledge
COMPETENCE - Context	Use advanced skills to conduct research, or advanced technical or professional activity, accepting accountability for all related decision making; Transfer and apply diagnostic and creative skills in a range of contexts	Act in a wide and often unpredictable variety of professional levels and ill-defined contexts	Exercise personal responsibility and largely autonomous initiative in complex and unpredictable situations, in professional or equivalent contexts
COMPETENCE - Role	Act effectively under guidance in a peer relationship with qualified practitioners; lead multiple, complex and heterogeneous groups	Take significant responsibility for the work of individuals and groups; Lead and initiate activity	Communicate results of research and innovation to peers; Engage in critical dialogue; Lead and originate complex social processes
COMPETENCE - Learning to Learn	Learn to act in variable and unfamiliar learning contexts; learn to manage learning tasks independently, professionally and ethically	Learn to self-evaluate and take responsibility for continuing academic/professional development	Learn to critique the broader implications of applying knowledge to particular contexts
COMPETENCE - Insight	Express a comprehensive, internalised, personal world view manifesting solidarity with others	Scrutinize and reflect on social norms and relationships and act to change them	Scrutinize and reflect on social norms and relationships and lead action to change them