

POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH HANDBOOK

Chapter 21 - PGR Aegrotat and Posthumous Awards

Contents *(ctrl+click to open the section you need)*

1. Introduction	1
2. Scope.....	2
3. Definitions.....	3
4. Eligibility	5
5. Initiation of the procedure.....	6
6. Awards after Viva Examination or where a Viva is not an award requirement	6
7. Awards after Thesis Submission and before Viva Examination	7
8. Awards before Thesis Submission.....	8
9. After the Examination	11
10. Review of outcomes if the examiners cannot agree on a final recommendation.....	12
11. Outcome.....	12
12. Thesis embargo	12
13. Final thesis Submission	12
14. Certification	13
15. Graduation.....	13
16. Confidentiality & GDPR.....	14

1. Introduction

1.1 This policy relates to the pursual of an award of a Postgraduate Research Degree (PGR) in the event of the death of the candidate (**posthumous**) or the diagnosis of a terminal / debilitating illness or other medical incapacitation, prior to the completion of their programme (**aegrotat**).

1.2 This policy forms part of the University's Postgraduate Research Teaching Quality Assurance (TQA) Manual. Other University policies and procedures which are connected to this policy are as follows:

1.2.1 TQA PGR Handbook

- a. Chapter 11: Presentation of theses/dissertations for Postgraduate Research degrees: statement of procedures.

- b. Chapter 12: Handbook for Examination of Postgraduate Research programmes.

1.2.2 Ordinances

- a. [Ordinance 15](#) Post-Obitum Awards.
- b. [Ordinance 16](#) Aegrotat Awards.

- 1.3 Staff are advised to liaise with the Head of PGR Support about the Student Death Protocol, for details of how the University handles the event of a student death. When the Head of PGR Support is notified of a student death, this procedure **may** be initiated.
- 1.4 Supervisors are advised to refer to the TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 21, Annex 2: The PGR Aegrotat and Posthumous Awards: Supervisor guidance. Supervisors are not expected to make contact with a student's next of kin, and **should** liaise with the Head of PGR Support in the first instance if they are informed about a student death or a student who is unable to proceed with their award due to the diagnosis of a terminal / debilitating illness or other incapacitation, prior to the completion of their programme.
- 1.5 The Head of PGR Support (or delegated nominee) will be the "**point of contact**" with the candidate or the candidate's next of kin and will be responsible for sharing the outcome of consideration under this policy.
- 1.6 A guidance document to support the consideration of posthumous or aegrotat awards will be made available and **should** be provided to relevant staff and examiners that are involved in the examination of a candidate under this policy.
- 1.7 Procedures outlined in this policy are applicable to both posthumous and aegrotat awards, unless explicitly stated that a procedure only applies to one. Where a procedure only applies to one, it will be highlighted in bold. For example: "PGR examiners **may** recommend that a **posthumous award should** be made..."

2. Scope

- 2.1 This policy is applicable to University of Exeter students registered on postgraduate research degrees specified under the [Regulations Governing Academic Programmes](#).

[section 2: Graduate Research Programmes](#), with the following exceptions which are not covered by this policy:

- 2.2 **Professional Doctorates:** Where a student is enrolled on a professional doctorate and has completed some taught modules, the [regulations for Taught programmes](#) shall apply. They **may** be eligible for an exit award in recognition of the completion of their taught modules. Further information for Taught Students is available in the TQA Handbooks: Learning and Teaching Support Handbook and Assessment, Progression and Awarding: Taught Programmes Handbook. Every effort **should** be made to explore whether an alternative research degree **may** be considered for Professional Doctorate Students who have a complete (or near complete) research dissertation (e.g., MbyRes).
- 2.3 **Students in the taught phase of a 1+3, 2+3 or integrated PhD:** Where a student has funding for a "1+3" or a "2+3" award (1 or 2-year MRes followed by a 3- year PGR programme), this policy applies to the research (PGR) section only. Where a candidate is incapacitated during the MRes section of the programme, the [regulations for Taught programmes](#) shall apply. Further information for Taught Students is available in the TQA Handbooks: Learning and Teaching Support Handbook and Assessment, Progression and Awarding: Taught Programmes Handbook.
- 2.4 **Students registered for joint/double degrees or on a partnership with an external institution or organisation** will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Where students are registered on a joint/double degree or are registered on a partnership with another institution or organisation will not automatically be considered under this policy, as external parameters **may** apply. Where possible, discussion with the partner institution/organisation will be needed to confirm what options are available for the student/student's next of kin.

3. Definitions

3.1 Posthumous Award

- 3.1.1 PGR examiners **may** recommend that a **posthumous award** is made following the death of a candidate who died prior to completing their research degree,

provided that the candidate completed a significant body of work to demonstrate that they would have met the appropriate standard for the award.

- 3.1.2 Posthumous awards **should** have the support of the deceased candidate's next of kin and the Department DPGR prior to any application or an examination under this policy.

3.2 Aegrotat Award

- 3.2.1 PGR examiners **may** recommend the **award of an aegrotat research degree** if it is considered that a candidate's diagnosis of a terminal/debilitating ongoing ill-health or their medical incapacitation would preclude them from completing their research degree, provided that the candidate completed a significant body of work to demonstrate that they would have met the appropriate standard for the award.

- 3.2.2 Noting that candidates **may** become unwell or for other reason decide to interrupt or withdraw from their studies, they will only be considered under this procedure for an aegrotat award where they have received a prognosis that would prevent their further engagement in any study or research for the foreseeable future, such as traumatic injury or a terminal and/or debilitating illness. As such, **Aegrotat** awards are not made as an alternative to the application of reasonable adjustments to the viva or examination of the thesis.

- 3.2.3 **Aegrotat** awards do not confer eligibility for professional registration nor exemption from meeting the conditions of professional qualifications that might otherwise be granted upon completion of the candidate's programme of study. For students enrolled on professional doctorate programmes, refer to Section [2 above](#).

- 3.2.4 Any application for an aegrotat degree **must** be accompanied by appropriate medical evidence which confirms the candidate's inability to proceed with their award. This **must** be from a medical professional and **must** confirm the candidate's diagnosis of a terminal/debilitating ongoing ill-health or their medical incapacitation which would preclude them from completing their degree (see

Section [3 above](#) for definitions). Where such documents are produced in a language other than English, a certified translation is required.

3.2.5 The candidate is required to confirm that they will accept an **aegrotat** award prior to any consideration to make an application or an examination. Where the candidate is able, they **may** provide written consent for a next of kin to act on their behalf. Where the medical evidence confirms that a candidate is not able to provide written consent, the next of kin **may** act on their behalf.

3.2.6 The **aegrotat** award will be considered as the conclusion of a student's registration on the programme, and there will be no further re-assessment. In line with the University regulations. The candidate **would not** be permitted to enter a further period of research study based on the same topic, should their condition improve, and they once again become fit to study.

3.2.7 Applications for **aegrotat** degrees will be considered by the Head of PGR Support (or delegated nominee), the PGR Manager and the Department Director of Postgraduate Research (DDPGR) who will submit a case to the Dean of PGR, who will consider the circumstances and advise the Examiners. The application **should** be copied to the Faculty Director Postgraduate Research (FDPGR) for information.

3.2.8 The Dean of PGR will be required to consider whether the medical evidence is sufficient to demonstrate that the candidate is not able to complete their programme and will confirm this with the Board of Examiners.

3.2.9 The option to award an **aegrotat** degree is at the sole discretion of the Examiners and is considered a matter of academic judgement.

4. Eligibility

4.1 Both posthumous and aegrotat research degrees **may** be awarded at any stage of the programme or examination process, provided that the candidate completed a significant body of work to demonstrate that they would have met the appropriate

standard for the award. For this reason, the awards will normally only be considered in exceptional circumstances.

- 4.2 Where a student has not completed sufficient work to be considered for their registered target award, consideration will be given for an application of a posthumous or aegrotat lower research degree, where appropriate.

5. Initiation of the procedure

- 5.1 In the event of a student's death, the student's IT account will be withdrawn. Ordinarily, a student's account is closed 16 days following withdrawal from the University, although this **may** be managed manually following a student's death.
- 5.2 When the supervisors and/or PGR Support are notified of a student death or informed of the diagnosis of a terminal illness or medical incapacitation of a student, this policy **should** be discussed. The PGR Support Team **should** share the policy with supervisors who can consider whether the student's research is at a point that an aegrotat/posthumous award could be considered. If they feel there is scope for an award, the Head of PGR Support (or delegated nominee) **should** discuss this with the student or the student's next of kin, as appropriate.
- 5.3 Upon request of the student's next of kin, the Head of PGR Support (or delegated nominee) **should** investigate whether written approval from the Registrar can be granted to approve that IT services **may** move the data in the student's account to a secure SharePoint where the next of kin and supervisors **may** access it. This **should** happen before the student's record is marked as withdrawn in SITS, where possible.

6. Awards after Viva Examination or where a Viva is not an award requirement

- 6.1 Where a viva has already taken place, prior to the death, diagnosis or incident which prevents the student from being able to continue with their research, or where a viva is not a requirement of the relevant award, the examination procedure **should** continue, as closely as possible, in accordance with the TQA, PGR Handbook Chapter 12 - Handbook for Examination of Postgraduate Research programmes. The examination **should** proceed as normal with the exception that any amendments will not be required.

- 6.2 The examiners **should** consider the merits of the work as presented and the candidate's potential to complete should they have been able to continue.
- 6.3 Examiners **should** refer to TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 21, Annex 1: the PGR Aegrotat and Posthumous Awards: Examiner guidance. Examiners are not expected to make contact with a student's next of kin or supervisors and **should** communicate with the University via the [Postgraduate Administration team](#).
- 6.4 The examiners **may** make one of the following recommendations:
- 6.4.1 There is sufficient evidence that the relevant posthumous or aegrotat award **should** be granted.
- 6.4.2 There is insufficient evidence to award the relevant posthumous or aegrotat degree; however, there is sufficient evidence to award a lower research degree.
- 6.4.3 There is insufficient evidence to make an award.
- 6.5 In exceptional circumstances, examiners who are unable to agree on a recommendation **must** submit separate reports. These reports **must** clearly articulate the reasoning for their recommendation. For further information see Section [10 below](#).

7. Awards after Thesis Submission and before Viva Examination

- 7.1 Where a thesis has been submitted but the viva has not yet taken place, prior to the death, diagnosis or incident which prevents the student from being able to continue with their research, the examination **should** continue, as closely as possible, in accordance with the TQA, PGR Handbook Chapter 12 - Handbook for Examination of Postgraduate Research programmes. The examination **should** proceed as normal with the exception that any oral examination, amendments, or resubmission would not be required.
- 7.2 If not already appointed, a non-examining independent chair (NEIC) **must** be added to the Board of Examiners, due to the extraordinary nature of the examination.
- 7.3 The examiners **should** consider the merits of the work as presented and the candidate's potential to complete should they have been able to continue.

- 7.4 Examiners **should** refer to TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 21, Annex 1: the PGR Aegrotat and Posthumous Awards: Examiner guidance. Examiners are not expected to make contact with a student's next of kin or supervisors and **should** communicate with the University via the [Postgraduate Administration team](#).
- 7.5 In place of the viva the examiners will be permitted to request additional information and/or ask questions of the supervisory team, via the [Postgraduate Administration team](#) prior to making an award recommendation via a joint examiner report.
- 7.6 The examiners **may** make one of the following recommendations:
- 7.6.1 There is sufficient evidence that the relevant posthumous or aegrotat award should be granted.
- 7.6.2 There is insufficient evidence to award the relevant posthumous or aegrotat degree; however, there is sufficient evidence to award a lower research degree.
- 7.6.3 There is insufficient evidence to make an award.
- 7.7 In exceptional circumstances, examiners who are unable to agree on a recommendation **must** submit separate reports. These reports **must** clearly articulate the reasoning for their recommendation. For further information see Section [10 below](#).

8. Awards before Thesis Submission

- 8.1 Where a thesis has not yet been submitted for examination, the material produced by the candidate which demonstrates their performance at the level appropriate for the degree **should** be collated and prepared for an initial assessment (see 8.4 below). This material **may** include:
- a. A full draft thesis.
 - b. Partially complete thesis.
 - c. Draft thesis chapters.
 - d. Published work such as conference posters/presentations or journal articles.
 - e. Datasets from research conducted.
 - f. Draft publications.
 - g. Any related documentation which was to have been incorporated into the thesis.
 - h. Any other supporting information e.g., progress or annual monitoring reports.

8.2 **For a posthumous award**, the lead supervisor is responsible for presenting the candidate's work for consideration. The supervisor **should not** add to or enhance the work. The lead supervisor will be required to confirm that the work is the candidate's own.

8.3 **For an aegrotat award**, the candidate is responsible, where possible, for presenting their work for consideration with support from their supervisor/s. If the candidate is not able to do so, the lead supervisor will collate the work on their behalf. The supervisor **should not** add to or enhance the work. The lead supervisor will be required to confirm that the work is the candidate's own.

8.4 Initial Assessment of candidate's work

8.4.1 An initial assessment **should** be completed by an independent panel to consider whether there is sufficient quantity of material to represent the thesis. The panel shall be chaired by the Faculty Director of PGR and supported by the Department Director of PGR.

8.4.2 The candidate (where possible), or the supervisory team, **should** prepare the thesis material for consideration by the initial assessment panel. Where a thesis is partially complete, in draft form, or supported by research articles which would have been incorporated into a final thesis, the linking statements **should** be included in the document that will be submitted for examination. These **should** demonstrate how the different aspects of the thesis were expected to fit together. Any such links not written by the candidate **should** be clearly indicated as being the work of the supervisors. This **may** include, but is not limited to:

- a. Published work such as conference posters/presentations or journal articles.
- b. Datasets from research conducted.
- c. Draft publications any related documentation which was to have been incorporated into the thesis.
- d. Any other supporting information e.g. progress or annual monitoring reports.

8.4.3 For **both aegrotat and posthumous awards**, the supervisory team **must** submit a written statement on behalf of the supervisory team, in support for the posthumous or aegrotat award, giving reasons why they feel that the degree

should be awarded, in line with the expectations as outlined in the relevant examination regulations for the award. The supervisor statement **should** explain the nature of the submission, outlining where the material produced by the candidate fits into the planned programme of work.

8.4.4 The initial assessment panel **must** be satisfied that there is enough to permit an academic judgement to be made in accordance with the **aegrotat/posthumous** examination process defined below.

8.5 Examination of the candidate's work before thesis submission

8.5.1 If the decision is to proceed to examination, a Board of Examiners **must** be appointed for both aegrotat and posthumous award. The Board of Examiners will comprise of an internal and external examiner, in accordance with the TQA, PGR Handbook Chapter 12: Handbook for Examination of Postgraduate Research programmes (section 4). The examiners **must** be made aware of the circumstances surrounding the examination, that is that they are considering an aegrotat or posthumous award (see also Section [16 below](#)).

8.5.2 The examiners **should** consider the supervisor report, the merits of the work as presented and the candidate's potential to complete should they have been able to continue.

8.5.3 Examiners **should** refer to TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 21, Annex 1: the PGR Aegrotat and Posthumous Awards: Examiner guidance. Examiners are not expected to make contact with a student's next of kin or supervisors and **should** communicate with the University via the [Postgraduate Administration team](#).

8.5.4 In place of the viva the examiners will be permitted to request additional information and/or ask questions of the supervisory team, prior to making an award recommendation via a joint examiner report.

8.6 The examiners **may** make one of the following recommendations:

- 8.6.1 There is sufficient evidence that the relevant posthumous or aegrotat award should be granted.
- 8.6.2 There is insufficient evidence to award the relevant posthumous or aegrotat degree; however, there is sufficient evidence to award a lower research degree.
- 8.6.3 There is insufficient evidence to make an award.
- 8.7 In exceptional circumstances, examiners who are unable to agree on a recommendation **must** submit separate reports. These reports **must** clearly articulate the reasoning for their recommendation. For further information see Section [10 below](#).

9. After the Examination

- 9.1 The Board of Examiners **should** complete the relevant Board of Examiners report form and return it to the [Postgraduate Administration team](#) after the examination. This report form **should** confirm whether the thesis is the work of the candidate (on the basis of the evidence provided) and indicate how the thesis meets the assessment criteria for the award in question (see the TQA, PGR Handbook Chapter 12: Handbook for Examination of Postgraduate Research programmes (section 7.2 'the Purpose of the Viva').
- 9.2 The report form **must** be completed and **signed** by all examiners, and the NEIC (where appointed). It **should** then be counter-signed by the Department DPGR (or nominee) and submitted to the [Postgraduate Administration Office](#) within three months of the receipt of the thesis by the examiners.
- 9.3 In countersigning and approving the report the Department DPGR (or nominee) **must** confirm that they have read the comments in Part II, and agree that the decision is in line with the examiners' comments and the outcomes as set out in this Policy, and the TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 12 - Handbook for Examination of Postgraduate Research programmes
- 9.4 The [Postgraduate Administration Office](#) will ensure that the report is submitted to the Dean of Postgraduate Research for approval, with final approval of award by Senate.

10. Review of outcomes if the examiners cannot agree on a final recommendation

- 10.1 Where the examiners cannot agree on a recommendation, their reports and the material considered will be reviewed by an independent external examiner, who will review the original examiners' reports along with the student's work, to make a final recommendation.
- 10.2 This final recommendation, with detailed explanation of their reasoning, will be held with the record of the decision and will be considered final.

11. Outcome

- 11.1 The [Postgraduate Administration Office](#) will send the Board of Examiners' report to the candidate or the candidate's next of kin, as appropriate, copying in the supervisory team and nominated point of contact.
- 11.2 Where appropriate the point of contact will liaise as necessary with regards to a certificate and/or attendance at a relevant graduation ceremony.
- 11.3 When providing an outcome that the full award cannot be granted, the point of contact will ensure that this would have been due to a lack of evidence to support the award rather than a comment on the absolute quality of the research that could have been completed.

12. Thesis embargo

- 12.1 The lead supervisor is responsible for confirming with the [PGR Administration Team](#) whether an embargo is needed for a complete thesis examined under this procedure. Where an award has been made to a document that is an incomplete thesis, the document will be placed under permanent embargo.

13. Final thesis Submission

- 13.1 Within 4 weeks of notification that the examiners are recommending an aegrotat or posthumous award, the [PGR Administration Team](#) will deposit the examined version of the thesis/dissertation into ORE (Open Research Exeter). [E-thesis Guidelines and E-thesis FAQs are available.](#)

- 13.2 Where a posthumous or aegrotat PGR award has been made, an explanatory note¹ will be added to the thesis title page specifying the nature of the award, in addition to noting any relevant additions necessary and publication limitations, where relevant.
- 13.3 Where an award has been made following examination of a document that is not a complete thesis, the examined work **must** still be submitted to ORE in the same format that it was presented to the Board of Examiners. An explanatory note² **must** be included in the title page of the document uploaded in addition to noting any relevant additions necessary and publication limitations, where relevant.
- 13.4 When the deposit into ORE is successfully completed the [PGR Administration Team](#) will share the link to the thesis with the supervisory team and the nominated point of contact, who will liaise with the candidate or the candidate's next of kin as appropriate.
- 13.5 If elements of the thesis require permission of a copyright holder and permissions has not been obtained, two versions of the thesis **must** be submitted to ORE, one with and one without the third-party copyright material. The removed material **should** be replaced with a statement such as "this image has been removed by the author of this thesis/dissertation for copyright reasons". Further information can be found on the [E-theses and Copyright](#) page of the University of Exeter Library website.

14. Certification

- 14.1 Where a posthumous or aegrotat award is made, it will be made clear on all documentation that the degree has been awarded posthumously or as an aegrotat award, e.g., Doctor of Philosophy (Aegrotat); Master of Philosophy (Posthumous).

15. Graduation

¹ This thesis has been examined in accordance with the University of Exeter's posthumous and aegrotat PGR award policy. The nature of this award is such that some errors might exist in this thesis.

² This thesis has been examined in accordance with the University of Exeter's posthumous and aegrotat PGR award policy. The nature of this award means that the candidate was not able to submit a complete thesis for examination. This document is the one that was assessed and shall be held under permanent embargo.

- 15.1 In the case of a posthumous award, or where an aegrotat awardee is unable to attend, a representative confirmed by their next of kin will be permitted to attend a graduation ceremony to receive the award on behalf of the awardee.
- 15.2 The University will respect the wishes of the awardee/awardee's representative with regards to attendance at, and involvement with, the ceremony. The Graduation Team will liaise with the Head of PGR Support (or delegated nominee) and the awardee/awardee's representative in respect to the graduation ceremony as outlined in the Student Death Protocol.

16. Confidentiality & GDPR

- 16.1 Consideration of candidates under this policy will mean that some members of staff will become aware of sensitive (health or other) data regarding candidates. Sharing this information **should** be limited as much as possible. For example, examiners only need to be aware that the candidate is being considered under this policy and do not need to have further information.