



**TUS**

**Technological University of the Shannon:  
Midlands Midwest**

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**TUS Postgraduate Research Regulations for Professional Doctorates 2024 - 2026**



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## TUS Postgraduate Research Regulations for Professional Doctorates

### 1.0 General Principles

- a) A professional doctorate is an NFQ Level 10 research degree which is oriented to elucidating and advancing intersections in research and practice in specific professional contexts through systematic academic enquiry. Professional doctorate programmes are oriented primarily (but not exclusively) to professionals in particular disciplinary fields including, but not limited to, education, psychology, engineering, business, administration, arts practice, sport, healthcare and science. The focus of professional doctorates is on the development of advanced level research skills which are married together with knowledge of trends, issues and developments in professional practices in a distinct area/combination of complementary areas, within, or related to, an academic discipline/subdiscipline. Professional doctorate programmes are also well suited to interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary doctoral research spaces.
- b) Essentially, professional doctorate programmes are oriented to 'knowledge-in-use' in professional disciplines/fields which is analytically examined through systematic academic research. With their emphasis on professional practice, professional doctorate dissertations frequently result in direct organisational, policy and/or practice related changes and developments. Although the first two years of most professional doctorate programmes encompass mainly taught modules, professional doctorates are classified as research degrees. Note: the mention of 'two years' in this context relates to full-time students; the length of time for full-time and part-time students to be registered on professional doctorate programmes is outlined in the next point.
- c) A professional doctorate degree will consist of at least 240 ECTS credits, of which at least 60 ECTS credits and at most 120 ECTS credits will be earned through structured taught modules. Professional doctorate programmes will be designed such that required ECTS credits to be earned through taught modules will normally be organised within the first two years of the programme for full-time registered students and within the first three years of the programme for part-time registered students. The usual length of time for a professional doctorate degree is four years full-time and six years part-time. Across the world, professional doctorates are taught using the following modalities: face-to-face, fully online, and blended/hybrid.

- d) Crucially, professional doctorates encompass structured taught modules (usually in years one and two for full-time students and in years one, two and three for part – time students) and interrelated research components including a thesis (usually completed in years three and four for full time students and in and in years four, five and six for part-time students). The ‘taught cycle’ of professional doctorate programmes usually focuses on advanced knowledge of research methodologies, reflective practice and high-level subject expertise whilst preparing students to undertake an advanced piece of research. In professional doctorate degrees, the research undertaken advances professional practice and essentially, these degrees view practice knowledge as a legitimate area of inquiry and/or field of study.

## 2.0 Programme Design, Approval and Entry Requirements

- a) The normal minimum entry requirements to a professional doctorate degree is a 2.1 honours undergraduate degree or a Master’s degree with second class honours in a cognate area to the professional doctorate degree programme. Some professional doctorate programmes may also require a minimum number of years’ experience in professional practice in a specific area/domain. In some instances, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policies may be applied where professional experience may be accepted in lieu of a grade requirement. This can be applied on a case-by-case basis in line with the *TUS Policy on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)*.
- b) Each taught module in professional doctorate programmes leads to the attainment of ECTS credits. Appropriate prior professional experience as RPL may also be accepted in lieu of some modules which is determined on a case-by-case basis in line with the *TUS Policy on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)*.
- c) Internal and external examiners should be appointed for all modules on professional doctorate programmes.
- d) A professional doctorate thesis should demonstrate that the student applies disciplinary theoretical frameworks and knowledge to professional contexts (and vice versa), resulting in a synthesis of contextual knowledge with advanced research and analytical, theoretical skills. Further details on professional doctorate research theses is provided subsequently in part 5 of this document.

- e) The award of a professional doctorate is subject to the same standards of academic rigour, research integrity and scholarly excellence as all other Doctoral/PhD NFQ Level 10 degrees. It is therefore seen as equal and equivalent to a structured PhD degree. The learning outcomes to be achieved in professional doctoral programmes should be oriented to the discipline/field and be oriented to the NFQ as follows: *“Learning outcomes at this level relate to the discovery and development of new knowledge and skills and delivering findings at the frontiers of knowledge and application. Further outcomes at this level relate to specialist skills and transferable skills required for managing such as the abilities to critique and develop organisational structures and initiate change.”*
- f) The award of a Professional Doctorate is made on the basis of knowledge, skill and competency normally gained through accumulation of the requisite ECTS credits, the successful completion of the research component in the form of a thesis, successful engagement with TUS progression processes and a viva voce examination. A professional doctorate cannot be awarded in instances where a student does not successfully complete any one (or more) of the four essential components below:
1. Thesis based on in-depth research of/in a distinct professional context;
  2. A viva voce examination;
  3. Distinct taught modules;
  4. Progression review(s) during the research cycle.
- g) Specifically, during the ‘taught cycle’ of professional doctorate programmes, the *TUS Academic Regulations for Taught Programmes* shall apply. With reference to the *TUS Academic Regulations for Taught Programmes* this includes the Principles of TUS Academic Regulations, Application of Academic Regulations, Amendments to Academic Regulations, Publication of Academic Regulations, Programme Specific Regulations and Force Majeure (Part 1); Part 2: Examiners and Assessment; Part 3: Award Classification; Part 4: Progression; Part 5: Extenuating Circumstances Relating to Assessment; Part 6. Academic Integrity and Assessment Infringements; Part 7: Results; Part 8: Review of Results; Part 9: Appendices; Part 10: Glossary. In the final years of the programme (the ‘research cycle’ usually years three and four for full-time students and years four, five and six for part-time students), the *TUS Postgraduate Research Regulations 2023 – 2026* shall apply to professional doctorates within TUS. The *TUS External Examiners Policy and Procedures for Taught Programmes* is also applicable in the taught cycle of the programme.

- h) Currently, the *TUS Postgraduate Research Regulations 2023-2026* prescribes modules in three distinct areas for Research Masters and PhD students in (a) Research Methodology, (b) Academic Writing, and (c) Research Ethics. Equivalent modules, that comprise at least 5 ECTS each, shall be embedded in professional doctorate programmes. While the form they take, and their composition, is largely contingent on individual programme boards, it is considered good practice to orient them to specific disciplines and professions. Examples might include "Engineering research methods", "Ethics in scientific research and practice", or "Academic writing in the social sciences" which are disciplined interpretations of the current modules. That said, it is acceptable for programme boards to adopt the current Research Methodology, Academic Writing, and Research Ethics modules on offer to Research Masters and structured PhD students if they deem these to be appropriate.
- i) All students registered on professional doctorate programmes in TUS are subject to the requirements of Part 4.3 of the *TUS Academic Regulations for Taught Programmes* 'Stage Progression' (pp. 26-27).
- j) Each professional doctorate programme shall have its own dedicated programme board. Each programme board for professional doctorate programmes is charged with the same responsibilities as programme boards for taught undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.
- k) Programmatic induction should be provided in year one to all professional doctorate students designed and delivered by the TUS Graduate School and specific programme boards in TUS Faculties.
- l) All Professional Doctorate programmes shall be approved by Academic Council. As Professional Doctorate programmes are cohort based with significant taught elements, and can include embedded awards, they shall be subject to a programme validation process, in accordance with the procedures for the validation of taught programmes, prior to approval by Academic Council.
- m) Exit awards after years one, two and three may be incorporated into professional doctorate programmes. For example, upon completion of year one, a full-time student may exit with a Postgraduate Diploma and at the end of year two, a Master's degree in a particular discipline (which would usually encompass 15,000-20,000 words dissertation). It is at the discretion of individual programme development teams and programme boards to incorporate exit awards into specific programmes at the design phase (or not).
- n) Students who wish to transfer into the research cycle of their respective programmes should produce, as part of an ECTS carrying module, a detailed

research proposal by the end of year two which is subsequently assessed by the year three programme leader(s), lecturer(s), and supervisor(s) as relevant, and the Graduate School representative. Training on the assessment process for research proposals shall be designed by the TUS Graduate School working in conjunction with individual programme boards. An external examiner shall also be appointed for this module.

- o) In the 'research cycle', all provisions of *TUS Postgraduate Research Regulations 2023 – 2026* shall apply to professional doctorates within TUS, save the regulatory provisions on prescribed modules (addressed in point 2h). Specifically, the areas of the *TUS Postgraduate Research Regulations 2023-2026* which apply to the research cycle includes Part 1: Principles, Governance and Policy; Part 2: Award Types; Part 3: Programme Development and Approval; Part 4: Supervision; Part 5: Studentship; Part 6: Application and Registration; Part 7: Progression, Registration and Transfer; Part 8: Examination; Part 9: Reviews and Disputes and Part 10: Conferment and Post-graduation.

### 3.0 Research Supervision Arrangements

- a) Where a student produces a successful proposal, they shall be allocated a supervisor by the TUS Graduate School and their individual programme board. Students who are registered on professional doctorate programmes have the same responsibilities as students who are registered on structured PhD programmes as per the *TUS Postgraduate Research Regulations 2023 – 2026*. This includes all stipulations pertaining to supervision such as informing the supervisor of any challenges and difficulties, agreeing meetings with supervisors and agreeing in advance with supervisors, the programme of work, aims, objectives and timeframe. This is commensurate with Part 5.3 Research Student Responsibilities as per pp. 26-27 of the *TUS Postgraduate Research Regulations 2023 – 2026*.
- b) The Principal Supervisor should be a full-time, permanent employee of TUS or if they are contract/non-permanent staff, their contract should exceed the normal length of time taken to complete the programme. As per the *TUS Postgraduate Research Regulations 2023-2026*, students will normally have two supervisors (a principal and a co-supervisor). The qualifications of supervisors is outlined in Part 4.1 of the *TUS Postgraduate Research Regulations 2023 – 2026* (p. 21). Co-supervisors from industry/professional organisations are permitted but they must fulfil the qualifications criteria as



outlined in Part 4.2 the TUS Postgraduate Research Regulations 2023 – 2026 (p. 22).

- c) In appointing supervisors, the Graduate School and individual programme boards shall take account of the research topic, specific methodologies employed, the areas of research expertise of individual faculty members and the students' own individual learning needs. Individual supervisors shall normally be appointed by the end of semester one in year two for full-time students and by the end of semester one in year three for part-time students, to allow students and supervisors sufficient time to co-produce detailed proposals. The process for appointment of supervisors must correspond to Part 4 'Supervision' of the *TUS Postgraduate Research Regulations 2023-2026* (pp. 20-24). External supervisors may also be appointed depending on the research topic (e.g. from universities other than TUS and/or representatives from professional bodies) as second and in cases, as mentor supervisors. All external supervisory appointments should be made in line with the requirements of Part 4 'Supervision' of the *TUS Postgraduate Research Regulations 2023-2026* (pp. 20-24).
- d) All supervisors on professional doctorate programmes are subject to the same responsibilities as supervisors appointed to structured and article-based PhD programmes. This is outlined in part 4.4 'Supervisor Responsibilities' of the *TUS Postgraduate Research Regulations 2023-2026* (pp. 22-24).
- e) Parts 4.5 and 4.6 'Change in Supervisor' and 'Complaints and Conflict Resolution' of the *TUS Postgraduate Research Regulations 2023-2026* also apply to students and supervisors on professional doctorate programmes (p. 24).

#### 4.0 Induction, Extensions, Freeze Periods, and Transfer

- a) A specific induction programme to the 'research cycle' of professional doctorate programme shall be designed by the TUS Graduate School and individual programme boards of TUS Faculties. Additional learning supports such as reading groups may also be offered by programme boards depending on the programme. A specific training programme that is tailored to the needs of professional doctorate students in the research cycle and writing up stages shall also be designed by the TUS Graduate School in conjunction with industry/representative organisations and individual programme boards of TUS Faculties.

- b) During the research cycle, all applications for freezes, extension periods, changes of supervisors etc. should be signed by appropriate parties and returned to the TUS Graduate School. The Graduate School upon having checked the completed applications for accuracy, errors and omissions shall furnish the form to the appropriate research committee at faculty level for their final decision on applications. To ensure clarity and transparency in process, programme leaders of professional doctorate programmes should attain membership of research committees at faculty level. Individual faculties should communicate their decisions on individual applications to the TUS Graduate School as per the current system.
- c) Decisions from individual Faculty Research Committees shall be communicated by the TUS Graduate School to the Postgraduate Studies and Research Subcommittee and subsequently to Academic Council. Minor amendments shall be made to existing application forms by the Graduate School to also reflect the needs of students and supervisors in relation to professional doctorate programmes and the programme structure. Subsequently, these forms shall be sent for approval to the appropriate subcommittee and Academic Council. In cases where documents are needed that are specifically tailored to professional doctorate programmes, they shall be designed by the TUS Graduate School and Programme Boards of TUS Faculties.
- d) Students in the research cycle of individual programmes are subject to the Progression, Confirmation and Transfer process as per part 7 of the *TUS Postgraduate Research Regulations 2023-2026* (specifically part 7.1.2 Annual Research Progression Review, pp. 32-33). Students who do not attend or who fail to engage with annual progression processes in TUS as appropriate will be removed from the register (see 7.1.2 Annual Research Progression Review, point b, p. 33). For full-time students, the final Annual Research Progression Review should take place at the end of year three and for part-time students, at the end of year five; the final year being devoted to writing and producing the dissertation. Representatives from professional bodies/organisations may also be invited to form part of progression review panels for professional doctorate degrees where appropriate.

## 5.0 Completion of Research Dissertation

- a) To successfully complete a professional doctorate degree, a student must submit a thesis in either monograph or article-based format in accordance with

the thesis regulations outlined in the *TUS Postgraduate Research Regulations 2023-2026*, wherein the following must be demonstrated.

- b) the candidate evidences a significant contribution to knowledge and scholarship in a specific discipline/field with distinct reference to empirical knowledge, systematic investigation of an issue or trend within a particular profession and application of high-level (and appropriate) research methodologies;
- c) the thesis should apply and correspond to the stipulations of NFQ Level 10 award as outlined on the NFQ;
- d) the student investigates a specific problem, issue (or set of problems/issues), which is critically examined through extensive analysis of academic literature and extant research, methodologies and techniques which are described and critiqued in depth in the resultant thesis.
- e) students must demonstrate a systematic understanding of knowledge which is at the forefront of a field of learning.
- f) the candidate completes the requisite ECTS credit requirement for the programme which may also encompass a placement in a professional setting. The incorporation of a professional placement component is at the discretion of individual programme boards.
- g) A Professional Doctorate thesis must demonstrate and correspond to the stipulations provided in Table 2 TUS Adopted Award Standard of the *TUS Postgraduate Research Regulations 2023-2026* (2.4.2, Criteria for Award of Doctor of Philosophy, p. 16).
- h) the student demonstrates original and critical thought in relation to the research problem under investigation, by way of extensive engagement with extant research which includes applied research that relates to specific professional contexts/domains;
- i) the candidate displays an appropriate depth and breadth of knowledge and understanding of the relevant field(s) of study in the thesis and at the viva voce examination.
- j) the candidate has gained significant expertise with respect to basic and advanced methodologies and analytic techniques.
- k) the thesis has an appropriate structure and writing style.

- l) the work is peer reviewed and is suitable for publication in academic journals that are peer-reviewed, as well as industry-focused publications/outputs that are appropriate to specific disciplines/fields.
- m) the thesis demonstrates sufficient contextual knowledge of a distinctive profession and/or encompass interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary knowledge of professional contexts that are synthesised and systematically analysed to NFQ Level 10 standard.
- n) the applied aspects of the work are usually discernible in dissertations produced in such programmes, save instances where students produce dissertations that are theoretically-based.
- o) the conclusions and recommendations contain sufficient reference to professional issues and policies as well as academic research.
- p) the candidate should in the viva voce examination communicate the results of the research in a systematic and objective fashion, demonstrating critical engagement and knowledge of their research problem and/or issues in relation to specific professions and other external developments that impact directly and/or indirectly on that profession.
- q) A maximum of 70,000 words applies to the length of dissertations for most professional doctorate programmes.

## 6.0 The Viva Voce Examination

- a) The award of a professional doctorate is contingent on the successful completion of a viva voce examination. The appointment of external and internal examiners must correspond to Part 8 'Examination' of the *TUS Postgraduate Research Regulations 2023-2026* (pp. 35-42). In cases where the candidate is a staff member of TUS, two external examiners shall be appointed. Internal and external examiners shall be recommended by the Principal Supervisor in consultation with the Co-Supervisors and Mentor Supervisor (if applicable).
- b) Viva voce examinations shall be organised by the TUS Graduate School in conjunction with individual programme boards. The TUS Graduate School has responsibility for appointing an independent chair of the viva voce examination.
- c) To uphold Part 8.5 of the *TUS Postgraduate Research Regulations 2023-2026* Part 8.5 'Preparation of Examiner Summary Report', examiners' reports shall focus on items (a) to (h) on p. 41 to guide their comments. The award

recommendations are the same as a structured PhD/Research Masters 'Award Recommendations as per pp. 41-42 (Part 8.5 Preparation of Examiner Summary Report) of the *TUS Postgraduate Research Regulations 2023-2026*.

They are as follows:

1. the degree of Professional Doctorate be awarded, no amendments needed.
  2. the degree of Professional Doctorate be awarded subject to the correction of any minor errors to the thesis within a period of three months for reconsideration by the Internal Examiner.
  3. the degree of Professional Doctorate be awarded subject to the completion of any prescribed amendments within a period of six months for reconsideration by the Internal and/or External Examiner, potentially including the requirement for a viva voce (with the same Examiners).
  4. no degree be awarded, and the student continues on the Professional Doctorate register for up to one additional year to complete revisions/rewrites;
  5. the candidate be awarded the degree of Masters subject to the completion of any prescribed amendments within a period of six months for reconsideration by the Internal Examiner.
  6. no degree be awarded.
- d) The process of reviews and disputes for the research cycle as outlined in part 9 ('Reviews and Disputes') of the *TUS Postgraduate Research Regulations 2023-2026* (pp. 42-43) applies also to professional doctorate students. Part 8 of the *TUS Academic Regulations for Taught Programmes 2023-2026* entitled 'Review of Results' applies to students in the taught cycle of respective professional doctorate programmes (pp. 45-48).
- e) Part 10 of the *TUS Postgraduate Research Regulations 2023-2026* titled 'Conferment and post-graduation' (p. 43) also applies to Students completing/who have completed professional doctorate degrees at TUS.

## 7.0 References

1. [TUS Policy on Recognition of Prior Learning \(RPL\)](#)
2. [TUS Postgraduate Research Regulations 2023-2026](#)
3. [TUS Academic Regulations for Taught Programmes](#)
4. [TUS External Examiners Policy and Procedures for Taught Programmes](#)