Title	Local Guidelines for Postgraduate Research (PGR) in the College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences (CMNHS)
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1. Introduction

These Local Guidelines for Postgraduate Research (PGR) degrees in the College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences (CMNHS), University of Galway, are intended to supplement the University Guidelines for Research Degrees (QA245). They provide College-specific guidance on the implementation and operationalisation of university-wide regulations, policies, and procedures within CMNHS. The guidelines apply to all postgraduate research students and supervisors in the College, including those registered on Structured and Traditional PhD programmes, relevant research master's degrees, and, where applicable, clinical and professional doctorate programmes that include a substantial research component.

Postgraduate research education within CMNHS is founded on deep engagement with original, rigorous research that advances knowledge and contributes to health, clinical practice, policy, and society. The goal of PGR education is to cultivate the research mindset, to nurture flexibility of thought, creativity, and intellectual autonomy through an original research project; the core component of PGR programmes is the advancement of knowledge through original research. While the research thesis remains central to the award of research degrees, CMNHS recognises the diversity of research contexts across laboratory-based, clinical, practice-based, and interdisciplinary settings, supported by appropriate supervision and governance structures. The PhD Graduate Skills Statement of the Irish Universities Association (IUA) enumerates the desired learning outcomes and skills that PhD students should develop during their studies. Structured PhD programmes integrate research with taught modules, training, and personal and professional development activities to support timely completion and the development of both discipline-specific and transferable skills, consistent with national frameworks for doctoral education and graduate attributes.

These guidelines should be read in conjunction with QA245 and with any additional School, discipline or programme-level handbooks. Together, they aim to provide a clear, coherent, and supportive

framework for high-quality postgraduate research training within CMNHS, while respecting the distinctive academic, clinical, and professional pathways represented across the College.

2. PGR Supervision

Supervision arrangements for postgraduate research students in the CMNHS, including roles & responsibilities of the supervisor, expectations regarding academic guidance, progress monitoring, and student support, are set out in Section 3 of the University Guidelines for Research Degrees (QA245) and apply to all postgraduate research degrees within the College.

Each postgraduate research student will normally be assigned a principal supervisor, who has primary responsibility for providing academic guidance on the research project and supporting the student's overall research training. Where appropriate, one or more co-supervisors may also be appointed to contribute complementary expertise. Co-supervisors may be drawn from within CMNHS, other Colleges within the University, affiliated clinical or healthcare institutions, or external academic or professional organisations, where this supports the quality and scope of the research, or provides additional expertise. In all cases, a principal supervisor must be clearly designated and conform to requirements outlined in QA245. Academics should not take on sole supervisory roles of PhDs when they are within four years of retirement, it is recommended that a co-supervisor is also appointed.

Supervisors are expected to meet with postgraduate research students on a regular basis, with the frequency and format of meetings agreed between the student and supervisor(s) and reviewed as the research progresses. In the early stages of the programme, meetings will typically focus on refining the research question, establishing an appropriate research plan and timeline, and identifying relevant training and development needs. Given the diverse laboratory-based, clinical, and practice-based research environments within CMNHS, flexibility in supervisory arrangements may be required, while maintaining clear communication and oversight.

Supervisors and students are encouraged to maintain appropriate records of supervisory meetings, including key decisions, agreed actions, and timelines. Such records support effective communication, help to avoid misunderstandings, and assist in monitoring progress over time. All correspondence between supervisors and students should adhere to University of Galway guidelines on professional communication and email etiquette.

Newly appointed academic staff are required to undertake training in postgraduate research supervision at the earliest opportunity as per university policy as defined in QA245. Supervision training is provided by the Graduate Studies Office and through programmes offered by the IUA. Ongoing professional development in research supervision is encouraged for all supervisors within CMNHS. Internal PhD scholarship schemes may require training is completed prior to commencement of postgraduate research supervision.

Supervisory arrangements operate within the broader governance framework for postgraduate research at University of Galway, including oversight by the Graduate Research Committee (GRC) and relevant School and College structures, as outlined elsewhere in these guidelines and in QA245.

3. Graduate Research Committee (GRC)

3.1 GRC Membership

The composition and role of Graduate Research Committees (GRCs) for postgraduate research students in the CMNHS are governed by the University Guidelines for Research Degrees (QA245).

Supervisors are not members of their own student's GRC. To ensure independence, objectivity, and the avoidance of conflicts of interest, close personal relationships that could reasonably be perceived to compromise impartiality should be avoided in the composition of GRCs. Any potential conflicts of interest must be declared and managed in accordance with the University policies and QA245.

An individual without a PhD may be appointed to the Graduate Research Committee where they have demonstrably relevant experience and can provide appropriate research advice and support. Preference should be given to those with supervisory experience and the capacity to monitor research progress and initiate timely intervention where required, including in relation to project direction, academic progress, or supervisory issues.

In line with QA245, in cases where a principal supervisor has not previously supervised a postgraduate research student to completion, it is good practice for at least one member of the GRC to have prior experience of successful doctoral supervision. The membership of the GRC should be confirmed as early as possible in the student's programme and reviewed if changes in supervision, research direction, or staff availability require amendment, in accordance with QA245. The primary supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the student is made aware of the members of their GRC within the first month of commencing their research programme.

3.2 GRC Procedures

The procedures and responsibilities of GRCs within the CMNHS are governed by Section 4 of the University Guidelines for Research Degrees (QA245). The provisions below outline how these procedures are implemented within the CMNHS and should be read in conjunction with QA245.

3.2.1 Annual GRC meetings and progress reviews

In accordance with QA245, the GRC will meet each postgraduate research student annually in April/May to review progress. Each GRC will have a designated chair who is responsible for finalising and submitting the annual GS050 form and undertaking other correspondence on behalf of the committee. Where a GRC member is unavailable, a replacement should be identified to ensure that the required membership is maintained. It is the responsibility of the primary supervisor to introduce the student to the members of their GRC prior to the first meeting of the student with their GRC. Ideally this should happen in the first month of their studies.

Prior to the annual GRC meeting, the postgraduate research student and supervisor(s) are required to submit the appropriate progress reports (GS-030 and GS-040, respectively), as specified in QA245. These reports form the basis for the GRC's review of the student's academic progress, research

development, training and professional development activities, and overall trajectory towards timely completion.

Students may be required to make a short oral presentation to the GRC outlining progress since the previous review and plans for the coming period. While such presentations may, where appropriate, be delivered in a public or semi-public forum in accordance with local School or programme practice, all other aspects of the GRC meeting are conducted in confidence and students should be encouraged to discuss their relationship with their supervisor(s) or any other sensitive issues affecting progress.

3.2.2 Outcomes & reporting

The Chair of the GRC is responsible for completing and submitting the required outcome documentation (GS-50) to the College, in accordance with QA245. The Chair should endeavour to draw any substantive points or concerns to the attention of the supervisor(s). The Chair should ensure that the student receives timely feedback following the meeting and both the student and supervisor is provided with a copy of the final GRC report (GS-50).

The GS-30 report remains confidential between the student and the GRC committee. Similarly, the GS-40 report remains confidential between the supervisor and the GRC committee. The student report (GS-30) should not be shared with the supervisor, nor the supervisor report (GS-40) with the student.

Where progress is not deemed satisfactory, the GRC may recommend appropriate actions in line with QA245, which may include the development of a remedial action plan and the scheduling of follow-up meetings. The purpose of such actions is to support the student in addressing identified issues and to facilitate progress towards completion. The GRC committee will confirm that the student has completed the requirements for the structured modules for which they are registered and that 30 ECTS of structured modules have been completed by the end of year 3. In accordance with QA245 in exceptional circumstances students may be allowed to take modules in Year 4, subject to the agreement of the student's GRC. In the case of part-time students, the GRC will specify an appropriate schedule for taking the modules of the programme.

3.2.3 Ongoing role of the GRC

Beyond the annual review process, the GRC has an ongoing role in supporting academic quality and student progress. This may include providing advice on research direction, training needs, and professional development, and contributing to the resolution of issues that may affect progress, in line with QA245 and College procedures.

In exceptional circumstances, where changes to supervisory arrangements are proposed or required, the GRC plays a key role in considering the situation and making recommendations in accordance with QA245. Any approved changes must be formally recorded and communicated through the appropriate School and College channels.

3.2.4 Problem resolution

When issues arise that significantly impact the PhD student's research work, they should be addressed as early as possible, preferably in an informal way. The student should, in the first instance, search for solutions locally (i.e. discuss with supervisor(s), followed by GRC, followed by the Head of School and/or

the Vice Dean of Graduate Studies). If necessary, the Head of School or Vice Dean of Graduate Studies can decide to escalate an issue to the Dean of the College and/or the Dean of Graduate Studies. PhD students should also be aware of the availability of representatives from the SU, College administrators, Student Counselling and other services. Finally, students have the right to make a formal complaint to the Dean of Students, following University of Galway procedures (https://www.universityofgalway.ie/media/studentservices/files/policies/QA611-University-of-Galway-Student-Complaints-Procedure.pdf).

3.3 Requirements relating to the 'mini-viva'

In accordance with QA245, PhD students are required to undergo a 'mini-viva' process with their GRC, within 2 years of registration for full time PhDs and 3 years of registration for part time PhDs. Individual Schools may decide on when the 'mini-viva' is held within this period. In cases where the 'mini-viva' is replacing an annual GRC meeting, the completion and submission of a written report on progress by the student and supervisor (GS-30 and GS-40) to the GRC remain compulsory. The process involves the PhD candidate advance submission of written work. The nature of this written submission is locally determined by the relevant School, programme, and/or disciplinary area, with specifications communicated to the PhD student at the programme's outset. The mini-viva report typically comprises 5,000 words, plus Appendices, and describes the work completed to date and a detailed PhD research proposal. This submission of written material is complemented by the PhD student's oral delivery of a formal presentation on their project's overarching aims, approach, and design. The oral presentation will be followed by a Mini-Viva Examination, during which the GRC members will query and offer constructive critiques on various aspects of the student's preliminary research and their PhD research proposal. The maximum duration of the Mini-Viva Examination, including the student's presentation, should be 45 minutes.

The purpose of this oral Mini-Viva Examination is to confirm that the PhD student:

(i) understands the research problem.

(ii) is aware of the associated literature.

(iii) has demonstrated capability to conduct independent research.

(iv) has a realistic research plan and schedule.

(v) remains capable of completing the PhD.

Appendix 1 contains a brief description of some of the components that normally constitute a Mini-Viva Report and should be regarded as guidelines only.

4. The student

Entry requirements and responsibilities of postgraduate research students in the CMNHS are set out in Section 5.1 and 5.2 of the University Guidelines for Research Degrees (QA245), respectively and apply to all postgraduate research degrees within the College.

5. Starting the Research Degree

All postgraduate students undertaking a research degree in the College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences are required to in their first year:

- Register for their discipline module in their initial registration,
- Attend the Orientation session organised by the Graduate Studies Office,
- Attend College level induction,
- Attend any local induction sessions organised by Centres/Schools/Units/supervisors

It is the responsibility of the student to undertake these trainings and the responsibilities of the supervisor to ensure that all appropriate training has been made available. Please see Postgraduate Research Students Orientation- University of Galway for further information.

PhD students must register online each academic year. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that they are correctly registered. Students should contact reghelp@universityofgalway.ie if their record is incorrect. Registration guides are available at: https://www.universityofgalway.ie/registration/how-toregister/

6. Postgraduate Research Programme

6.1 PGR timelines & milestones

The time limit for on time completion of Postgraduate Research Degrees is as follows:

- PhD (Full time) = 4 years
- PhD (Part time) = 6 years
- Masters (Full time) = 2 years
- Masters (Part time) = 3 years

These timelines encompass the time from first Registration to submission of the final, Hardbound Thesis following successful defence of the thesis in the viva examination. Appendix 2 suggests some sample PhD milestones (4-year, full time programme) that may be adapted in accordance with disciplinary norms and individual circumstances. Similar guidelines for MSc for Research programmes can also be found in Appendix 3. In cases where the work continues beyond these timelines, the GRC should meet the student more frequently to guide the student to completion (as per the University Guidelines, QA245, section 5.8.3).

6.2 Module Selection

All Structured PhD students normally complete 30 ECTS of modules within the first three years of their programme. The Structured PhD is a formalised, integrated programme of research, training, and personal and professional development activities. Modules function on a Credit/No Credit basis at PhD

level, and numeric marks will not appear on the final degree transcript. Successful completion and examination of the research is the basis for the award of the degree. The University Marks and Standards for Structured PhDs QA236 can be found here:

https://www.universityofgalway.ie/media/registry/exams/policiesprocedures/QA236-Postgraduate-Marks-and-Standards-final-marked-with-Irish-updates-following-Dec-22-AC-to-AC-Feb-23-June2023.pdf Registration for the Traditional PhD is available on an exceptional basis.

6.3 Research Integrity Training

You must confirm in your report to your GRC that you have undertaken basic training in Research Integrity (this is provided online and free of charge at https://www.universityofgalway.ie/researchcommunityportal/researchintegrity/

6.4 Personal Development Plan

Each incoming PhD student will develop a Personal Development Plan (PDP) and review it with their supervisor(s). The PDP is put in place during the PhD student's first year of registration and must be completed prior to the first GRC meeting. Please note that many funders now require the completion of a PDP within the first six months of a PhD student's registration. The PDP is a living document that must be reviewed and updated annually. Compliance is monitored via the GRC process. Relevant workshops and other resources on PDPs are available from the Researcher Development Centre (RDC). Guidance on how to develop a PDP can be found on the RDC SharePoint (https://nuigalwayie.sharepoint.com/sites/rdc/SitePages/Personal-Development-Planning-(PDP).aspx)

6.5 Format of Thesis and Submission for Examination

The candidate must follow the directions on format, layout and presentation of a thesis outlined in section 6.2 of University Guidelines for Research Degrees (QA245). PhD theses may be presented for examination in either monograph style or in an article-based format. A Research Master's thesis must be in monograph format and developed in accordance with Section 8 of QA245. The monograph style is where the work is usually laid out as a series of chapters, typically having the structure of introduction, literature review, methodology, results and conclusions. The article-based PhD is based on a collection of papers (including published papers or papers submitted or accepted for publication) which describe a coherent programme of research undertaken by the student while registered for the PhD. The decision of a student to avail of the article-based thesis format should be made early in the PhD in accordance with the norms of the discipline and with the agreement of the supervisor(s) and GRC. An article-based thesis also contains a short introductory chapter, explanation of the research question, relevant literature and methodology and a concluding chapter. The student's contribution to each article must be made explicit. Both formats for the presentation of the research work are equally valued, and both are subject to the same examination process and must meet the academic standards for the award as given in Section 6.1 of University Guidelines for Research Degrees (QA245).

6.5.1 Local CMNHS guidelines on article-based theses

A minimum of three peer-reviewed research papers in international journals of appropriate professional standing for the area of research is required.

In line with University guidelines, only articles which are based on research that has been undertaken by the student while registered for the PhD are admissible. In addition, the PhD candidate should be the primary author and be responsible for the major research contribution of the work. Joint publications may be included but the candidate must make explicit their contribution relative to that of any co-authors.

Conference papers/proceedings may be included in the thesis to show the progression of the research contribution but are not considered articles in the context of the requirements for completing an article-based thesis within the CMNHS. Where such supplemental papers contribute to the natural flow of the contribution they may be included in the body of the main thesis; otherwise, it is recommended they are included as an appendix.

If it is anticipated that the body of research may create intellectual property that may need to be protected, it is suggested that the candidate follow the monograph format thesis.

APPENDIX 1: Mini-Viva Report Guidelines for PhD students

The following contains a brief description of some of the components that normally constitute a Mini-Viva Report and should be regarded as guidelines only.

The Mini-Viva Report should comprise approximately 5,000 words not including references. It should include figures and tables summarising research findings to date. The purpose of the mini viva report is to provide a clear and critical review of your progress at the midway point of your PhD. The report should demonstrate that you have developed a strong understanding of the research area, made meaningful progress, and have a realistic and achievable plan for completing the project within the remaining period of study.

Although shorter than a full thesis, the report should broadly follow the structure and style of a PhD thesis. It should present a coherent narrative of the research problem, the work completed to date, preliminary findings, and future directions. This report can then form the basis for developing your full thesis.

Recommended Structure (discuss with your supervisor on how best to adapt to your discipline area)

Project Title, Name and Name of Supervisor.

Abstract (150–300 words)

Provide a concise summary of the research problem, your main aims/objectives and key progress to date. Briefly describe your planned future work. The abstract should allow a reader to quickly understand the scope and status of the project.

Introduction (800–1,000 words)

Introduce the broader research area and explain:

- The background and motivation for the project
- The research gap/problem being addressed
- The significance of the work
- The overall aims and research questions/hypotheses

This section should clearly establish the rationale for the project and position it within the field.

Literature Review (1,000–1,500 words)

Critically review the most relevant literature related to your topic, demonstrating that you understand the current state of knowledge in your field and can identify the gaps. Compare and evaluate existing studies in the literature, identifying their strengths, limitations, and controversies. Explain how your work builds upon this body of knowledge, highlighting the specific gaps your project addresses.

Methods / Research Design (600–900 words)

Describe the methodologies you have used so far in your studies and the rationale for these choices. Depending on the discipline, this may include:

- Experimental methods
- Computational approaches
- Data collection procedures
- Clinical study design
- Analytical techniques
- Ethical considerations
- Statistical methods

Explain why the chosen methods are appropriate for addressing the research questions. Indicate what future methodologies your plan to use or learn.

Progress and Preliminary Results (1,000–1,500 words)

This is the core of the report. Summarise the work completed to date, including:

- Experiments, analyses, or studies undertaken
- Preliminary findings/results
- Figures, tables, or diagrams where appropriate
- Interpretation of results
- Problems encountered and how they were addressed

Be honest and reflective. Your GRC understands that projects evolve and that not all work proceeds as originally planned.

Discussion and Future Work (500–800 words)

Ideally this should discuss the following:

- What the results/progress mean in relation to the original aims
- Remaining challenges or limitations
- How the project direction may have evolved
- A clear plan for the remainder of the PhD, including:
- Proposed experiments/analyses
- Writing plans
- Timeline and milestones

Aim to demonstrate that the project is feasible within the remaining time.

Conclusion (200–300 words)

Provide a concise summary of the importance of the research, progress achieved, the expected impact of your completed PhD

References

Use a consistent academic referencing style appropriate for your discipline (e.g., Harvard, APA, Vancouver, IEEE). Ensure all citations are accurate and complete.

General Advice

Write in a formal academic style. Aim for clarity, coherence, and critical analysis rather than excessive detail. Use headings and subheadings to improve readability. Include figures/tables where they strengthen the discussion. Proofread carefully for grammar, formatting, and consistency. Ensure the report tells a coherent “research story” from motivation through to future plans.

A strong mini viva report should convince the review panel that:

1. You understand the field and research problem,
2. You have made substantial progress,
3. You can critically evaluate your own work, and
4. You have a realistic plan to successfully complete the PhD.

APPENDIX 2: Sample PhD Milestones for Local Adaptation

Year 1 – Foundation, Planning, and Training

Research & Project Development

- Establish supervisor–supervisee expectations
- Select and refine research topic and questions
- Conduct background literature review and situate project in the field
- Develop overall project plan, methodology, and data collection strategy
- Prepare for data analysis (e.g. relevant software/tools)

Training & Professional Development

- Complete all induction and orientation requirements
- Begin Structured PhD modules
- Complete Research Integrity training
- Identify training needs and agree Personal Development Plan
- Develop PDP

Governance & Ethics

- Obtain ethics approval (where required)
- Develop data management plan and governance plans in line with university policy

End-of-Year Outcomes

- Research design and project plan in place
- Literature review well advanced
- 10–15 ECTS credits completed

Year 2 – Data Collection & Analysis

Research Progress

- Manage project through interim goals and milestones
- Continue experimental work / fieldwork
- Begin data analysis and generate preliminary results

Dissemination

- Prepare and submit conference and/or journal publications

Training & Professional Development

- Review training needs and update PDP
- Continue Structured PhD modules

Assessment & Progression

- Complete Mini-Viva
- Confirm continuation with PhD studies
- Demonstrate clear progress toward thesis writing

End-of-Year Outcomes

- Data collection underway
- Initial analysis completed
- 30 ECTS credits completed (cumulative)

Year 3 – Analysis, Writing & Dissemination

Research & Analysis

- Complete data collection
- Conduct in-depth data analysis and interpretation

Writing & Thesis Development

- Develop and submit thesis outline to GRC
- Draft substantial sections of the thesis

Dissemination

- Prepare and submit conference and/or journal publications

Professional Development

- Update Personal Development Plan

End-of-Year Outcomes

- Core analysis completed
- Significant proportion of thesis written
- Research outputs submitted or presented

Year 4 – Completion & Examination

Writing & Finalisation

- Finalise data analysis
- Complete and refine all thesis chapters

Dissemination

- Publish final research outputs

Examination Preparation

- External and internal examiners appointed
- Submission date agreed and thesis submitted
- Viva examination completed

End-of-Year Outcomes

- Thesis submitted and examined
- Research disseminated
- PhD completed

APPENDIX 3: Sample MSc by Research Milestones for Local Adaption

Year 1 – Foundation, Planning, Training, Data Collection and Analyses.

Research & Project Development

- Establish supervisor–supervisee expectations
- Select and refine research topic and research questions
- Conduct background literature review & situate project in the field
- Develop overall project plan, methodology, and data collection strategy
- Prepare for data analysis (e.g. relevant software/tools)

Training & Professional Development

- Complete all induction and orientation requirements
- Complete Research Integrity & Ethics training
- Identify training needs and agree Personal Development Plan
- Undertake relevant research methods/statistics training as required

Research Progress

- Manage project through agreed interim milestones

Assessment & progression

- Develop and submit thesis outline
- Confirm continuation with MSc studies

Dissemination

- Prepare and submit conference and/or journal publications (where applicable)

Governance & Ethics

- Obtain Ethics approval (where required)
- Develop data management plan and governance plans in line with university policy

End-of-Year Outcomes

- Research design & project plan finalised
- Literature review completed
- Ethics approval obtained (where applicable)
- Data collection progressed according to agreed milestones

Year 2 – Data Analysis & Completion

Research & Analyses

- Complete data collection
- Complete data analysis & integrate findings with existing literature

Writing & Thesis Finalisation

- Finalise data analysis
- Complete and refine all thesis chapters

Dissemination

- Prepare and submit conference and/or journal publications

Professional Development

- Update Personal Development Plan

Examination Preparation

- External and internal examiners appointed
- Submission date agreed and thesis submitted
- Viva examination completed

End-of-Year Outcomes

- Thesis submitted and examined
- Research disseminated
- MSc by Research completed